Trystie's Quest

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Trystie's Quest

or

Kit, King of the Pigwidgeons

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"It rolled over on to its breastplate" (p. 25)

Trystie's Quest

or

Kit

King of the

Pigwidgeons

a Fairy Story

By Greville MacDonald MD

Author of "The Magic Crook:
or the Stolen Baby"

Illustrated by Arthur Hughes.

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Dedication

To Miss Mollie Gamble

A LITTLE baby-maid but four years old
Came to my heart just begging that my hand
Should cure her trouble, brought from some far land
Where mischief-making Fairies, all too bold,
Mix tears with joy—if all be true that's told.
Then, quick, the Fairy Queen, with loving wand,
Bound that small heart to mine with silken strand,
And numbered us within her magic fold.
Though I, each time I came, in healing must
Bring to that child so many a sob and tear,
She daily welcomed me with smiling glee.
For fourteen years, you, Child, in joyful trust
Have cherished all I gave as very dear :—
I think, whoe'er loves you, you'll still love me!

G. McD.

Sept., 1912.

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Trystie's Quest

CHAPTER I

Particulars of the Family at the Farm, including Curdie, the Sheep-dog—Kit tells his Mother something very important.

THE Pigwidgeons are a strange little people. They are neither fairies nor goblins. Fairies are sweet and loved by everyone but goblins, though they are not always good and are often very silly. Goblins are sour and feared by every one but fairies: they are not always bad, and have a trick of looking wiser even than owls. Yet to tell what fairies and goblins are, and to describe Pigwidgeons by saying they are like neither one kind nor the other, cannot help us very much.

But it is very important that everyone, children and grown-ups, should know what these creatures are and something of their history. They have never been properly described before, chiefly because nobody ever succeeded in living among them till our Kit discovered their country. The best way of telling about them will be to give the story of this little traveller, who, though no one will believe me till he has read all about it, was actually made their king. He didn't have a happy time of it. He assured us that sitting on a throne was dreadfully uncomfortable—not a bit like what you might think! But, as well as the

horrid things, he told us of heaps that were ever so funny and jolly, especially after Trystie came to his rescue. Indeed his adventures just matched his own and the sheep-dog Curdie's enterprising natures, and were unlike anything ever told before. He is always remembering something he had forgotten to tell me; and if I waited for everything, I don't think I should ever get this story done.

Kit is eleven years old now. He was just ten when the Pigwidgeons acclaimed him King. So he could hardly write a bookful without more labour than lessons will allow. His spelling, too, though good of its kind, is not the dictionary kind! When we had our walks on the Downs—especially when the sky was turning into darkest blue, the first stars beginning to twinkle, the sheep bells going *tinkle-tankle-tink* before us down the white road to the folds, and a shaggy, bob-tailed dog trotting in front of us—when we took such walks, Kit and I, he would tell me all about his adventures. I am sure he was accurate in the smallest particulars, because I would often want some parts told over again, and he never varied them.

Then there was Trystie. She was just thirteen when she and Kit and the other two boys went their separate ways into the same far country. She was a darling child who came to us one night two years before Kit found his Pigwidgeons. How and why she came to us no one knew for certain; but it was straight out of Fairyland. But for her, I should never have brought the baby—Princess Honeypot, as Kit called her—home again when the fairies stole her. That story has been told and this is another one. There are two new babies now, twins—such merry chirping things! Kit has named them Prince Tom Tit and Princess Jenny Wren. So, though I am a shepherd and farmer,

the mother and I have a live prince and two princesses for our children. Between Kit and these come Davie and Robin. Altogether we are seven children, including Trystie ; and three old people, including Curdie. Curdie is only six years old ; but in a dog like him, half wise fairy, half cuddle-bear, half happy dog, and all the rest of him human, six years count for hundreds of miles of travel and oceans of wisdom and long tales of waggery--though he hasn't the shadow of a tail to call his own ! So he's one of the old ones, and consequently he went with Kit on his journey. Then last, come the children's nurse and best friend, Kirstie ; and the sheep's nurse and best friend, Jonas.

So much for the human people. But the others are important enough to speak for themselves, though some only bellow, some neigh, some baa, and some crow or twitter or sing delicious songs. These humble creatures belong to the Farm and the family and the Downs ; and so the family, the farm and the Downs belong to them.

One day in late April, when showers were romping with the sunshine over the great green Downs and back to their quiet nursery, the glittering blue sea—which we can look down upon when we get to the top of the green hill a little to the east of the farm—Kit came running to his mother in the kitchen. She had just put her batch of bread into the great brick oven, and her hands and apron were still floury. She did all the bread-making herself, besides keeping the dairy ; and no one in the world ever tasted such sweet loaves and butter as hers. Just now you could see in a moment that something was troubling Kit's mind.

" What is it, Kit ? " asked his mother. " Is it seven-times-eight, or twelve-times-nine ? "

"No, Mother," he answered—his great trouble in life just now was the multiplication table—"I think I knew *them* all right yesterday and p'raps they'll keep now. No, it's something else—quite different."

Then he hesitated.

"What is it, then, Kit?" she asked again, as she carried the flour-tub into the larder; "is it Bully Butcher Broom again?"

Bully Butcher Broom was a school bully. Kit had more than once thrashed him for pinching and terrorizing Davie.

"Him!" said Kit scornfully; "not quite! It's *much* worse. It's Jonas."

"Why, what's dear old Jonas done?"

"Mother," Kit said slowly and hardly able to control his voice for indignation, "Mother, Jonas is really, *really* a something I mustn't say, *but you know what.* I know he is, because he makes me *think* it almost out loud. He says—he says—Father's a *dandy* shepherd!—isn't that terrible?—and that he didn't ever bring Honeypot out of Fairyland—when I remember he *did*—and he says it was gipsies stole her and Father just found her. And he says—he says—he says"—it was as much as Kit could do to keep back his angry tears—"he mustn't ever tell me the secret because Father's father wasn't a shepherd, so he is only a dandy shepherd, and because he didn't ever really get into Fairyland."

Jonas, I must say at once, loved Kit to an extraordinary degree and would do anything for him. But his temper was queer, though the children loved him. He was also, I admit, the wisest shepherd on the South Downs, yet unwilling to allow that I, his master, knew anything about sheep, as my father was not a shepherd too. But then, in

some ways, I have learned a great deal about sheep that he can't learn because he won't believe there are things he doesn't know. Yet he would do anything on earth to help me; and, before I was told of this conversation, I had never heard of his speaking so disrespectfully of me. I suppose I'm a dandy shepherd because I like my boots and gaiters well greased every day—even though I do them myself! But I don't think he really doubted that I had been into the very heart of Fairyland to find the baby. Gipsies indeed! I wish he had seen the sort of gipsies I had had to fight!

"O, never mind Jonas," said the mother. "He's only a dear grumpy thing, Kit; he'll tell you the secret some day soon, when his rheumatism is better."

"But, Mother," said Kit, pulling her arm towards him, to prevent her going till he had had all his say; "he's not *all* grumpy and he's never grumpy to the lambs. They don't mind being twins or orphans when he's nursing them. And he rocks them to sleep and croons to them just like Kirstie." Kit was never so eager in his tumbled-out utterance as when he was standing up for some one he loved, even though the moment before he had been full of indignation against that very person.

"But what's the secret, Kit?" his mother asked. She ought perhaps to have remembered, but had so many other things to think about with seven children and a husband to look after—not to mention the troubles of all the poorer folk for miles round.

"Don't you *know*, Mother?"—as if the secret were the most important thing in all the world—"Why, the fairy pipe and tabor, of course!"

Then the mother knew she must give Kit some of her

precious time all to himself. When he was really worried about something, she knew it was serious and she must do her best for him just as if his troubles were so many loaves a-baking or butter a-churning, or, for that matter, Jonas's grandbaby's arm that had just been vaccinated. So, after taking off her apron and washing her hands at the pump by the back door and drying them on the round towel, she sat down and drew him to her side, saying they would have a good talk about it all.

"You see, Mother dearest" (Kit had such endearing words for his mother when he got her all to himself!), "I *can't* make my own pipe, and I must, Jonas says, if it's to be a real pipe. I must make it by my own self if it's to call fairies. And how can I when it's a secret? Jonas knows nearly all the people in the world, and he says he doesn't know anybody but himself who's got the secret. And he's got it because his father was a shepherd and his father and his father's grandfather and lots of old grandfathers all the way back to Abel. And Jonas's father spent all his Sundays, nearly, in Fairyland. And Jonas has made a good pipe, but says *he doesn't want no fairises*[1] *to rumage* HIM. And he says—and he says—nobody who's got the secret must ever give it away, 'cept to boys whose fathers are real shepherds who have seen real fairies. And he says father is a *dandy* shepherd, and only *thinks* he found Honeypot in Fairyland. And so, Mother, that's what I mean when I say Jonas is exactly something I mustn't say he is! That old *mustn't* makes me simply *hate* him!" The child set his teeth tightly.

"Christopher!" said his mother in expostulation, putting

[1] The Sussex folk pronounce this word as though it were identical with *Pharisees*. There are some funny stories of their actually confusing the two words.

"I can't and I won't!"

him at arm's length. She called him by his full name only when he was not quite good.

"Well, Mother, then I don't! But I can't love him. I can't and I won't!" The boy then leaned on the corner of the table, buried his face in his arms, and angrily kicked the brick floor.

"And just this minute you were telling me how he nursed the baby lambs!"

Kit was silent for one whole minute.

"O well, Mother," he then said, coming to her side and opening his heart again, smiling happily again, "Well, I think I *do* love him all the same—only, only, I think he's *very nearly* what I mustn't say!"

CHAPTER II

The Attic in the Barn—Kit makes his Pipe and makes his Audience —A strange Result.

THE trouble was very real to Kit. Davie would often begin to do or make something and then tire of it. But with Kit, anything undertaken became a duty till it was done. So now it was inevitable that he should make that pipe and call the little people to his side. His industry was amazing. Constantly at this time, when other boys would be playing or reading stories, he would sit at work and alone in the gable-end of the barn. This gable-end was close under the roof, and had been floored across with wide oak boards, so as to make a platform, which was reached by a ladder from the floor below. Here in winter roots were stored, swedes and potatoes chiefly, but also beets, turnips, onions, carrots; and on shelves, apples when they were very plentiful. This end of the barn was very dark, but the small gable itself was dimly lit by a circular leaded skylight of blue, red, and green glass in minute diamond panes. It was no bigger than a soup plate. No one had ever seen it open. What purpose it had ever served I cannot say. The colours were so rich, and the glass so thick, that I am sure the little window was very old. Indeed it was in this gable-end that, years before, we had found an ancient coffer, and in it a certain Magic Crook which has been elsewhere told about. The whole farm and buildings

are very old, and the owls could tell wonderful stories of our children's ancestry.

It was always in this dim-lit loft that Kit would labour at making his pipe and tabor—or *whittle and tab*, as the old people called it. Standing guardian over the barn is an ash bigger and older than any I have ever seen in the south. When the wind was tossing and fluttering its leafy shadows across the lichened tiles, a sunny company of coloured lights would dance upon the old floor within and strengthen Kit in his conviction that some day he would get real fairy people there also. The eeriness of the place gained much from the strange faint snoring of the owl-fledglings up among the rafters—a snoring performed when the queer baby-birds are wide awake and hungry for more mouse-meat.

Kit would set in a row before him the great clumsy swedes and try his pipes upon them. Getting no visible response, he would take purple-red mangolds and beets, greeny white turnips, red carrots, and brown potatoes. With his pocket-knife he cut faces on them : long slits of mouths, some smiling, some crooked, with grains of wheat for teeth ; scooped-out nostrils ; round or oval eyes according to the creature's character, with boot buttons or beads for pupils ; and, most important of all, big ears of all shapes, so that there should be no excuses for not hearing his pipe and tabor. The ears were the chief difficulty. Strips of leather from a derelict and bulgy horse-collar made donkey ears ; bits of rabbit-skin stood for flat ears like Curdie's ; two bits of pink silk that he begged of Kirstie served for pig's flapping ears ; while little pointed cat's ears he moulded out of putty and soot, and could not get his hands quite clean all the next day. He looked with

covetous eyes upon Princess Honeypot's blue frock in process of making and secured some stray pieces for one necktie. He got enough horse hair from the combings of Wicksy's mane to plait another tie. He borrowed some brass trappings from Charley, the carter, and made one serve as breastplate for a giant swede, with slices of carrot for buttons. He stuck through it the rusty spring of an old rat-trap and on to this again a little purple mangold, in which he cut an awful slit of a mouth. The mouth drooped at the corners, so that it looked like a bitter smile. He gathered lichen for an old man's beard, green moss for a witch's hair, and skinned a dead mole for the dress of a lady. He found the best things for arms and legs were the roots of heather, which twist about as if really intended for the limbs of grotesque creatures. Altogether he made twelve extraordinary people, with wonderful individuality of character, though their hearts were all earthy and their brains very thick. He so arranged them in a half-circle that the coloured lights should dance before them and show them the way of life.

O, Kit was full of enterprise! He still wore a smock on weekdays; but no smock ever before had so many pockets inside it. Hence his figure was generally as queer as his swedes' and potatoes'. For the pockets were always stuffed full of the most important things in the world—bits of leather and wood, buttons, beads and string—more than one pocket-knife—often live creatures, such as shrews and moles, guinea-pigs and rabbits. But at this time the chief contents were such musical instruments as the shepherd folk have made and used from the most ancient times. He had even made an attempt at pan-pipes. But nearly all the specimens were whistles or pipes with finger-holes, while

their proper accompaniment, the tabor or little drum, he would carry slung across his back. Kit knew that the shrillness of the pipe, in spite of its sweetness, needed the deep tones of the tabor if the fairy people were really to be pleased. He said the pipe gave the bird-notes—especially starlings', who are so friendly with the sheep—and the tabor gave the sheep-baas, without which shepherds like Kit—no dandy shepherd he !—and Jonas never feel even the larks can sing quite at their best.

But one thing was still needed—the secret that Jonas would not tell.

One day I saw Kit at his work, though he did not know it. I was up a ladder at the other end of the barn making friends with a family of ugly young owls. We still have a threshing-floor in the barn and store our wheat ; hence many an owl nests in the barn and lives upon the rats and mice. The big doors were shut, so that Kit's gable-end was the lightest place in the barn. He was so busy with his pipe and tabor that he did not hear me. One hand held the little pipe as he blew into it and fingered the holes he had cut in the reed ; the other gave the needful tone and insistence by beating upon the little drum, or tabor ; and the whole time, the child's head was quickly jerked from side to side keeping the time of his tune. Beside him lay his little crook that once had saved a real lamb from drowning. He had tied a bunch of gay ribbons about its bright iron head. They had been bought for him by Trystie some weeks before with three long-cherished pennies of his own, though he would not tell what he wanted them for. Sometimes he shut his eyes for a long two minutes, only to open them suddenly upon one or other of his grotesque images—as if thinking to catch them unawares just coming to life.

As I quietly stood on my ladder at the other end of the barn, so as not to disturb the child, the impossible thing he desired so ardently came to pass—perhaps only apparently, perhaps actually—I was too far off to be quite sure. The biggest of the absurd creatures—the one with the bulging yellow body adorned with painted black rings, the brass breastplate and the carrot-buttons—suddenly, and at the very moment Kit opened his eyes upon it, began to totter, as if, poor thing, it was going to faint! Then it rolled over on to its breastplate. Kit quietly and with infinite self-possession picked up his crook to be in readiness to help it if necessary; and then began again to pipe so loud and merry that I could make nothing of the tune.

Now, if I didn't feel quite sure that every child who has father or mother with a streak of fairy-soul in them will believe me, I would not tell what followed. Nor would Kit. We know better than most people what must not and cannot be told. You can't wish a scarecrow many happy returns—not if you shout it in his ear—not even if you send it a telegram. It can nohow be done; and why? because a scarecrow can't understand. Exactly for the same reason you can't tell the reallest of things to people who don't believe in fairies—not though you get a bishop or a king to tell them—and why? Just because they can't understand. So neither Kit nor I would waste our breath to warm a plate of cold porridge. But no one who has got as far as this in the story of Kit can be either a scarecrow or a plate of cold porridge; and, as nearly all children have fairy-blood in them, though their fathers often deny it, I'm going to tell what next I saw. Kit and Trystie will be responsible for most of the story which comes afterwards.

Well, the loud and merry piping—perhaps because it was so horribly out of tune and screechy—seemed to bring the fallen imp round. It rolled over on to its back. Kit's head wagged at it, still in time with the pipes: it wagged and wagged, though his eyes were fast fixed on the silly imp. Then actually the thing began to waddle from side to side and got out of the charmed half-circle. The little brass breastplate tinkled as the imp moved, and the carrot-buttons fell off one by one, till it looked quite disreputable. It came nearer and nearer the edge of the floor, and was on the point of falling to the ground below, when Kit jumped up and tried to catch it with his crook. But the creature's head, which was only a mangold, came off the spring backbone, and the rest of the creature fell five feet with a thud and jingle. At that very moment the sun must have been covered by a cloud, for the jewelly light vanished and the whole place was dark. No sound or movement came from Kit; but I heard, and Kit heard, a sound of wings among the rafters; and as I opened the great door, having quickly left my ladder when the imp fell, an old brown owl flew out into the daylight.

Then Kit came slowly down his ladder with a steady step and joined me without a word. He put his hand in mine. His little face was quite white, and his blue eyes were big and far away. He told me nothing then of his wonderful —if rather horrible—success with the pipe and tabor. He would not eat anything at tea, though there were gooseberry jam and clotted cream. He went to bed and was fast asleep before his mother came to tuck him up and sing with him his little prayer.

CHAPTER III

Jonas is very kind—His Belief in Fairies—The great Secret—"Mind they Pigwidgies, Master Kit!"

IT was only bit by bit that the boy wormed the wonderful secret out of Jonas. I think the old man perhaps only half believed it was true, and so was unwilling to tell it. He was a funny mixture; full of the strangest out-of-the-way wisdom; talking of his sheep as though they had human feelings—as indeed they have to a wonderful degree; full of bird-lore and natural history of all kinds; and yet, with his old saws of worldly shrewdness he would cut in pieces the children's castles in the air, if he thought they were "settin' too much store by they silly fairises." At the same time he would talk in such way to the children about the birds and wild flowers and creeping things as to make them feel that everything held a deep meaning in its life. So that, more than any one else about the place, except Trystie, he was responsible for Kit's conviction that one way or another he had just got to find Fairyland for himself.

Kit slept right through that night when he went to bed without his tea, and was up and out of doors with the lark, which means by five o'clock in early May. We give our children an unusual amount of liberty—especially Kit. They must be quite punctual at school and meals; but Kit and Davie go to bed just when they are tired and get

up when they please—which is always very early—play what games and choose what companions they like. Their mother would seldom be anxious about them for two reasons : first, because their appetites—whether for food, or bed, or playmates—were always healthy ; second, because Curdie, when relieved of his work with the sheep, used always to go everywhere with them. The only thing that they needed reminding about was school-time. This duty Curdie took upon himself. School, though a sad puzzle to his wise head, was to him the one thing that must be rigidly obeyed. Somehow he always knew when it was time for them—Kit and Davie—to start. He would go half-way with them, but, funnily enough, never the whole way. The school is only about a mile from the farm ; but Curdie, though he knew it must be, always disapproved of school, and thought half-measures were quite good enough for it !

On this particular morning, I say, Kit was up with the lark ; and Curdie, of course, was up too. Kit had to see Jonas and tell him about the swede and the old owl, because, he thought, now he was beginning to have some success, Jonas would trust him with the secret. The child found the old man with his flock just starting from the fold to go up to the Downs, and so trotted along by his side and told his news. Though he often wanted to call Jonas, when he was grumpy, the thing he mustn't, the child was no more afraid of him than of adders or gipsies, stoats or Bully Butcher Broom. Kit had never learned to be afraid : I think it was because his happy smile made all creatures, man, snake or bird, feel what a deep spring of kindness and trust was always bubbling from the little heart.

Jonas listened as though the tale were quite as important

as Columbus's discovery of America. Then he made one decisive remark :

"That there swede was one o' they Pigwidgies—and that I'll swear to! You must look out, Master Kit, they don't never suspicion you can see 'em at it, or they'll have your eyes out!"

This was the first time Kit heard of the strange people who later made him their King. Kit begged to be told more about them.

"You'll find out in good time, Master Kit. But doän't you play too much on that pipe o' yourn. It's *screechy* as does the mischief—and screechy out of tune. When you've got the right sort of pipe and play it sweet and shrill, then you'll get the right sort of fairises. Pigwidgies is—well, what you'd expect from things that likes *screechy*. Birds doän't, except owls. Now I'll tell you the secret. But it's all in pieces—same as a flock of sheep. Look'ee here, now! You've got to pick 'em all up where you can find 'em, and put 'em together in your pipe. And you must get 'em one by one from the birds—the blackbirds and the starlings and the wheatears and the tits and the finches. And there's only one can tell you how to fold 'em together safe, so that they dances together when you turn 'em out on the Downs ; and that's the sweet nightingale. She's the queen of 'em, she is, and you'll allus find her where she sings same as if she warn't never *there*, like! But they're all fairises when you come to call upon 'em. That's the way of it, Master Kit!"

"Jonas, dearest!" said Kit with such thankfulness and eagerness that he used this gentlest of kind words ; "how can they all *get* into the pipe—such a lot of them?"

"Ah, that's the biggest part of the secret! How to

chuck more into your pipe—more'n it 'll hold! You *can* do it all day long in Fairyland—and fetch out more nor ever you put in, like. So it *must* be a fairy pipe: you pipes into it what a little boy can—which ain't much, but more nor it can hold; and it comes out ag'in shriller and sweeter, and such a powerful run of it that all the sheep stop cropping and chewing and tinkling their bells; and all the larks drop into their nesties; and if you walk away while you pipes, they all follers, same as that there pied piper I've heered tell of, or that Orph'us, liar and heathen though he was. And that's about the size of a fairy pipe!—You come and take a cup of tea along of us, Master Kit, and I'll show you my pipe. It's a real recorder and döan't want no tabor. And I'll *larn* you!"

People have nearly forgotten about that wonderful kind of pipe called a *recorder*. Bird-warbling used to be called *recording*;[1] and this sort of instrument could give all the music of all the birds, and in such a way that, when the birds heard from it what they themselves could do, it quite surprised them to see how much heart and soul they had.

You may be sure Kit went early enough to see Jonas at tea-time. He took some of his mother's cakes for the children, and had the vaccinated baby on his knee and sang a little song of his own, and played with the bobtail pup, so that the poor baby stopped crying at once. Then old Jonas came in with his two tired dogs—none the less wise for being queer mongrels. Kit had to wait patiently till

[1] "Sweet robin, linnet, thrush,
Record from every bush."

BEN JONSON.

The bird-catchers still speak of the young cock-birds *recording*, that is, practising, their notes.

C "Old sweetnesses in his life"

tea was over—so strong it was out of the big brown teapot and such a lot of bread and jam the seven children ate! and how they grabbed at the cakes!—before Jonas, their grandfather, fetched down from the top of the dresser his dusty old recorder. He hadn't touched it for twenty years, he said, and his hands, he was afeared, were too rheumaticky to finger the warbling out. But he managed to let Kit hear how exquisitely sweet its sounds were.

Soon the boy could hear, mixed up, as it were, with the old folk-song tunes, notes of the blackbird and of the starling imitating him, of the linnet and wheatear; and then, in the song of the Sweet Nightingale, he could hear the queen bird's thrilling and commanding music. Kit must have sat stock still with eyes fixed on the old grey shepherd and his red wrinkled neck and closed eyelids—I know just how they sat and looked. Then one, two, three big tears, Kit told me, trickled out from under the old eyelids. They came, I am sure, because his pipe recorded to him old sweetnesses in his life besides songs; old hopes, too, that would never die. Soon the old man put the pipe down on the table; and Kit stroked its black shiny body as he would a bird, tenderly, firmly, with no fear of frightening it away.

Then Jonas let Kit try the recorder; but his fingers were only just big enough to reach the holes, and he could find only a few stray notes. But they were sweet enough to make the boy very happy, sweet enough indeed for Jonas to make him a promise. He was to come with him on Saturday—when there was no school—up on to the Downs, after he had tried some new bells I had given the old man for some of the younger sheep—"to larn the bells the use of their tongues," he said. "Then," he went on, "if they all behave"—the lambs had not been long weaned, and this

was to be the first time they were to rejoin the flock—"we'll set down and I'll larn you how to make the pipe you want."

Then Kit had to go. As he went Jonas called after him with a chuckle, "Mind they Pigwidgies, Master Kit! and mind your eyes! It's *screechy* as does the mischief!"

CHAPTER IV

An Expedition to Pixhaven—Robin's Air-ball—First appearance of the wonderful Peppermint Bull's-eye.

BUT the first Saturday after Jonas made his promise to Kit, I had to drive into Pixhaven;[1] and the event could not be missed by Kit either for pipes or Pigwidgeons. I took the old wagonette with Wicksy and Goodboy, two of our horses. There is a whole hand's difference in height as they stand together. But Goodboy, who is getting old and is quite white, hangs his head a bit; and Wicksy, who is a red-roan, holds hers high enough to show she is the better half. They don't *seem* to match at all. Goodboy's collar is brown, Wicksy's is black. Goodboy has long legs and a sorry tail, Wicksy short legs and a proud tail. Goodboy always looks sad until he sees a hill before him, when he pricks up his ears and tramples all the difficulty under his clean hoofs. Wicksy has saucy eyes and loves to look sideways out of them, so that Davie says she can see the lumps of sugar in his pocket. Though they are so different to look at, they are splendidly matched when off for a day's work together. Goodboy has taught Wicksy how to go uphill as though she likes it; and he is so proud of her that

[1] This little-known sea resort, Pixhaven, is a puzzle to topographical etymologists. Some say the jet, which is occasionally picked up on the shore, was at one time in such abundance that the Latin name for pitch came to designate the bay. But Trystie, whose instinct in fairy lore is generally right, thinks the word is an abbreviation of pixie, a particularly mischievous kind of fairy.

directly they get on to the sea-front of Pixhaven, he holds up his head high enough to make their difference quite funny. They are well agreed upon many things—the friendliness of Curdie's bark, which, to please him, they pretend to be frightened at; the delight of crunching up loaf-sugar; the inferiority of all oats not out of their own bin; and lastly, that from no one will they put up with the least tickle of the whip! As to this, I never carry one.

This Saturday was a lovely day. The young green on the trees was soft and happy; the quiet staring primroses were at their biggest and sweetest; and the birds were all a-twitter with the excitement of nest-building and dear nonsense. The mother came with us, and we took Trystie and Robin, Kit and Davie—two and two on each side, and Mother on the box-seat. Both Robin and Davie, the one cherishing a little green and red pail, and the other holding his wooden spade, wanted some looking after; so that Kit was grave as a judge in his responsibility. In fact just now any one could see he had some very important thing son his mind; and, during the ten-mile drive into the town, he had other things to do besides restraining Robin's sudden desires to climb on to the seat and lose his balance all because a bullfinch, though quite a stranger, cocked its eye at him, or a rabbit beckoned him with a twitch of its ear. Curdie, of course, came with us, running the whole way and almost the happiest of the party.

Kit was thinking, every spare minute of his time, how best to manage his Pigwidgeons. He had made up his mind that his queer roots would some day prove to be Pigwidgeons. He was quite annoyed at the defiant way they looked at him when he was doing his best for them with

his pipe. He felt sorry for them, and deeply responsible; troubled, too, that he could *not* keep the screechy sound out of his pipe. Jonas was quite right—more screechiness came out of it than ever he put in! He began to wonder if it was not partly the creatures' own fault because they liked that sort of music better than bird-notes, sweet and thrilling. He had mended the fellow who rolled off the platform on to the floor, and had fixed its breastplate and buttons more securely, and had set it in its place again. But somehow its eyes were all wrong and crooked, and it looked very wicked. Once I had a peep at them all when Kit was at school. Certainly this one in particular did look villainous! I think many an imaginative child might have become really afraid of it, even though he had made it himself. But I never knew our Kit afraid of anything. On Friday, also, I had taken the mother up the ladder to see how things were getting on, and found Kit had added another to his audience. He had found a very big, severe-looking, two-legged old parsnip. He had wrapped it round with a bit of rusty black velvet, so that, with a new bit of white tape for a necktie, it looked precisely like a respectable if sickly parson, though, most unfortunately, one with bare legs and no shoes. Some sprouting roots at its feet Kit had trimmed so that they looked very like toes—but six to each foot! The head was a shrivelled little apple; and brown pips were pinned through for eyes, the outer points slanting downwards. He had cut a long drooping mouth, and seemed satisfied that it should have neither nose nor ears. Kit felt more respect for this one than the others, and told me afterwards that he didn't want *him* to hear his pipe till he had made a better one. But before many weeks were over, he gave it for ears a couple of those

striped snail-shells so plentiful on the Downs, and a nice bit of pale putty for a nose.

It was a holiday at Pixhaven. As we got out of the wagonette, there stood an old man selling gilt paper windmills on a stick, and air-balls tied together like a giant bunch of red, blue, and green grapes. The old man was calling out, "Buy my fairy-airy balls! Buy my merry mills! Penny each! Penny each!" When I had taken all the things out, I found Robin looking steadfastly at Goodboy, who at the moment was hanging down his head. Curdie thought that he must copy Robin, and also fixed his eyes on the old horse.

"What is it, Robin?" Trystie asked him.

"I think," the little one answered as if considering very carefully, "Goodboy looks as if he's going to cry."

"Why, what has he got to cry for?"

"Curdie thinks," answered Robin, still thoughtfully, "Goodboy wants a blue fairy-airy ball!"

That was Robin's way. He was not hinting for some one to give him one, I am sure; rather, seeing the old horse looking tired, and realizing at the same moment the creature's need of oats together with his own longing for an air-ball, he rolled the two desires into one.

"Well, Robin," I then said, pulling his little ear, "shall I buy Goodboy an air-ball and take my little boy to the White Hart stable and give him a feed of corn?"

Then Robin saw the joke and danced for joy because he knew the ball I was then paying for would be his, and that Goodboy preferred the corn. Trystie—one of whose mysterious gifts being that she always had a penny and sometimes a sixpence to spare—bought a red air-ball for Honeypot, and a windmill for the twins. She said the ball

would tell them what they mustn't do—fly away to Fairyland, and the windmill what they must—stay at home and let the wind blow them about all the same.

Trystie seemed to be always thinking about Fairyland. She was fond of telling the little ones stories of certain children at the bottom of the sea always looking for lost keys, because they couldn't get home till they had found them. Kit was often quite sad about these children, and used to promise to go with Trystie if ever she went to find them. How the two of them actually did get into Fairyland will be told later.

We had brought our dinner in a basket. I put the horses up at the White Hart and joined my family on the shore. After dinner I had my business to do, and so left them all with Curdie. When I came back to them, a little incident was beginning that had some importance in helping Kit to deal with his queer creatures, whose making, as I say, he was becoming more and more anxious about, owing to their wicked propensities. Had not Jonas warned him that they might pick his eyes out? He had no fear himself, but felt so worried for them that he had almost determined to tell Trystie all about it. He had not done so yet because he felt sure, though she knew lots about Fairyland, she could not understand the pipe-music and his Pigwidgeons, which, after all, were only swedes and that sort of thing!

There were many delights on the beach for the country children, though Trystie seemed to find more pleasure in the little ones' happiness than in the unaccustomed sights. Chief among these was a Punch and Judy show, which they had never seen before. To Kit—though he was ten years old and most town boys would have laughed at him

for his wonder—this was a mystery-play indeed, full of a huge excitement, not the less glorious because its hero was as bad as bad could be. That Punch should maltreat his baby, kill its fond mother, humbug policeman and hangman, and then cheat the gallows and trick the ghost, were, because of the comical ever dodging the grim, greedily enjoyed. Davie took the whole thing very seriously, and would not talk about it afterwards. But Robin, because the ill usage of the baby and Mistress Judy made him cry, had to be marched away by his mother to a rival show of performing cats. Curdie watched Punch with an air of patronizing disapproval, but kept his head turned away towards the cat-show whenever Toby appeared on the scene. Trystie said he couldn't bear to see honest flesh and blood mixed up with bad wooden manners—not even when Toby seized his bully of a master by the nose and shook him !

On the outskirts of the Punch-and-Judy's audience our children's attention, as the crowd broke up, was arrested by a very pale, dirty and shabby family of four. The eldest, a girl and no more than six years old, was mothering two small sisters and a boy. These three had been crying, and the six-year-old mother was quite cross with trying to soothe the toddling two-year-old boy, who was howling lustily. Each held a thick slice of bread, thinly smeared with red spotty jam and in different stages of demolition. As soon as he realized the situation, Kit ran off, stumbling and scrunching his little feet into the beach shingle. Calling out as he went, " I know, mother ! " he made for a white-aproned man selling sweet-stuff in a basket. He brought back a bagful of those large peppermint bull's-eyes, which are made only at Pixhaven, and through whose stone-

yellow, streaky surface shines a rich, dark-brown pupil, for all the world like the eye of a kindly cow. He gave one to the howling child, who instantly set to work quieting his stormy bellowings into undulating sobs, and so successfully that the sun shone out of the tear-stained face in a smile of sublime satisfaction. We then took all four to a little shop and bought them buns and jumbles. The mother had learned from the eldest of the four how their father was away fishing and their mother out at work all day. It seems they had been sent out after breakfast to be happy, each with a slice of bread and jam and a penny for their dinners; and they must not come home till tea. For them it was but a long and dreary holiday.

As we started for home again in the wagonette, Kit gave three of his remaining bull's-eyes to Trystie, Davie and Robin, and offered the last one to his mother. She would not have it, however, knowing that Kit himself had not had one. So the boy, after some hesitation, wrapped it up in its bag again and put it in one of his many pockets, as if for some important possibility he had that moment remembered.

Trystie was now beside me on the box-seat. Behind us I presently heard Davie asking his mother why the youngest of that poor little family had been so naughty.

"I think," the mother said, "they were all so tired that they *couldn't* be good any more—and so hungry too for some better food than bread and jam. Goodboy wouldn't be so brave now, nor Wicksy toss her head so saucily, unless they had had good corn to eat: oats are better stuff than bakers' bread for children as well as horses. You see, Davie, they were all happy, even the tired, cross child-mother, as soon as they got the bull's-eyes. But I don't think even the bull's-eyes would have done it but for

something else hidden away in the sweeties. What do you think that was, Davie ? "

Kit looked up quickly at his mother, as if going to speak, but went a bit pink and was silent. The mother still looked to Davie for the answer. He, puzzled, consulted the passing tree-tops for a whole minute, and then asked, rather doubtfully and with head on one side :

" The peppermint-*taste,* was it, Mother ? "

The answer was perhaps rather a come-down from the tree-tops ! But little Robin piped in, as if in approval :

" I do *love* bull's-eyes ! " and left his mother's side to cuddle up by Kit, who, he knew, had one of the wonderful sweets still in his pocket.

The mother laughed heartily—and so did I and Trystie.

" No, no, Davie," the mother said, " it must have been something better even than peppermint that fed the tired goodness in the children. Wasn't it love and kindness ? "

" 'Course it was ! " said Robin, with such an air of *I-told-you-so-all-along* that Davie, in an aggrieved and querulous tone, said :

" Well, why couldn't you say so, Stupid ? "

Threat of trouble between the two younger boys at once appeared. But Kit, the big-brother-umpire sitting between them, put an arm round each of the tired heads. Then he gently rubbed their noses together—" like Hottentot friends," he said—till they laughed and kissed and made it up again. I looked round for a moment and saw Kit's head above the other two beaming up at his mother as if in full understanding of her question, though he had been too shy to put it into words.

Robin then got into his mother's arms and fell fast asleep, still holding the string of his air-ball ; Davie joined

us in front and helped me drive ; so that we had a happy, quiet journey home.

Before many days were over the remaining peppermint bull's-eye proved of strange, indeed, most extraordinary, use to Kit. I can't help thinking that afternoon had much to do with the wonderful adventures so soon experienced by him. He never forgot the shocking Punch or the miserable Judy or the gallows. But the most important thing learned was the effect of the bull's-eye in bringing sunshine out of sulks and storm.

I need hardly speak of the delight Honeypot discovered the next day in her red air-ball, or even of the twins' in their windmill—a delight that lasted many days. But poor Robin, only three days after, let his blue air-ball escape; and a sudden gust of wind carried it straight up into the big ash that overhangs the barn. We could see it easily ; but, though its string hung down, no ladder could reach it. While, however, there was life there was hope. The little blue balloon could be plainly seen. Every day it was carefully examined by its owner's keen eyes ; and every wind was enjoined to bring it safely to earth again.

CHAPTER V

Awful news about Parson Parsnip—A Picnic under the Beeches—Kit succeeds at last and follows his Pigwidgeons.

EARLY every Saturday morning, when there was no school of course, Kit went with Jonas on to the Downs; and nearly every evening after tea he went to the shepherd's cottage to try what he could do with the old black recorder. Every night before going to bed he took a slice of bread and butter up to the gable in the barn, and cut it into thirteen square pieces of nearly equal size. He set one piece before each of his grotesque figures, having first cut the crusts off and eaten them himself because their teeth were not strong. Parson Parsnip always got the biggest piece, because he was the thinnest of all. On the top of old Crickety's—as he named the one who got the fall—he put the bull's-eye which he had brought from Pixhaven. When, the next morning, he visited his queer little people, he always found the bread and butter gone; but the bull's-eye was still there, though often a good distance away from where he had put it, and scratched all over! This way of showing the creatures that he really wanted to be kind to them was suggested, we feel sure, by the poor little family at Pixhaven: Kit hoped he would, by feeding the Pigwidgeons, succeed in turning their sour looks into smiles. Yet he had his doubts, because he felt sure they were wicked. You had only to look at them to see that

even the parson would have been capable of any crime but for his white tie! The worst of them was Mr. Crickety. Besides being wicked, he was sulky rather than tired; for though Kit gave him the bull's-eye every night for his supper—and you could see from the scratchy marks that he had tried his teeth on it, and must like it!—he had always kicked it away from him before morning.

All these particulars we found out from Trystie, who was now taken into Kit's confidence. You must not suppose that Kit made any secret of it; a child who has no fear does not often want to keep things secret from people he loves—unless they're presents, of course! But the bigger the business Kit had in hand, the less he wanted to talk about it; and both his mother and I thought it better not to question him about his affairs in the gable. He would tell us everything in good time, we knew. Indeed he would often give us little bits of news concerning his progress, taking it for granted that we knew all about his creatures. We all understood what he wanted the slice of bread and butter for every night.

Kit was going ahead finely with his pipe also, both in its construction and in getting music from it. He had at last actually made one that Jonas, to the child's joy, said "might be wuss." The old man never gave any praise, though he was always helping and telling him to try again. Thus, when Kit first told him about the Pigwidgeons' supper and Mr. Crickety's bull's-eye, Jonas said only one contemptuous word—"Rats!" But he added, "Rats it may be, but rats is all right! Go ahead, Master Kit, and feed 'em if you like. Howsomedever it's music *they* wants. But doän't you go for to let 'em know you done it all, or they'll googe your eyes out, parson or no parson. And

doän't you be afeared of the Creaky Cart behind you, but pipe away!" A few days afterwards Kit had to face these possibilities, Creaky Cart and all—and he did it so bravely that I think—well, I mustn't tell what I think of my own boy!

One evening, when Kit took the creatures their supper, he played to them really quite sweetly with his little pipe. I happened to hear it as I was passing the barn, and had stood to listen for some minutes. There was still a screechy note that would come into the tune and generally at the same place; and it set one's teeth on edge all the more that he was beginning to get some really bird-like notes and trillings. He went on playing till it was nearly dark, and came indoors looking very bright-eyed, but quite white and tired. The next morning, after his brief visit to the gable before school, he came running in great excitement to his mother and Trystie, who were both in the dairy.

"Parson's white tie is all cock-eye under his ear!" he said breathlessly. "He's fell on his side doubled up, and his toes are squinting at each other! And Mr. Crickety has gone right across to him and he *does* look queer! And Mother, Mother, the bull's-eye's *gone!* So I *know* their wicked faces must smile soon. But they're all blue afraid of something: that's clear as bells!" (an expression of Jonas's).

After dinner-time the mother and I had a talk about the boy, and we agreed that he was thinking too much about his absurd creatures. It was near midsummer then, the days long and sunny. So, chiefly for Kit's sake, we took the whole family, except the twins, up to our favourite beech-wood on the top of the Downs and had a tea picnic.

The children did not often get us both together like this and were overjoyed. We built a fire, boiled our kettle, sang country songs, and set potatoes to roast in the hot ashes. I told them, for the hundredth time or more, about the Fairy Queen, and how I and Trystie and Honeypot had visited her palace at the bottom of the sea. Honeypot is the only one of us who looks sceptical, although she still wears the necklet of shells she brought home with her: it won't come off, you know, but seems to grow bigger as her soft little neck gets fatter.

Whenever I tell them fairy stories, Trystie is my best listener. She is a strange, most loving child, with a sort of happy shyness that you see in a robin as he picks up crumbs from the kitchen floor on a snowy morning. Trystie does not talk much; but she watches you so deeply, if you are one she loves, that you *feel as if* a dear elf, hidden in the branches of a hawthorn full of pink blossoms, were wanting to take care of you. She is always eager to be told anything; and as soon as she gets hold of any new fact—especially if about living creatures—she lifts up her head for a moment like a bird drinking water, as much as to say, "Now I understand!" She never seems to forget anything. The children are always happy with her; and she is so clever with them that Kirstie, who this summer had gone home to her own people in Scotland for three months, was not seriously missed. So, when I say Trystie looks most like herself when I am telling fairy stories, you will guess what I mean. Children look most like themselves when they are happiest, least like themselves when selfish and unkind.

It was time to go, for Honeypot was almost asleep in my arms. The two small boys were beginning to think more

of the potatoes slowly roasting, and Robin was restless, saying he had toothache. Kit was lying very still with his head in his mother's lap, looking up into the green tree-tops. But the mother and I wanted to be alone and take a further walk on to our favourite hill overlooking the sea—the hill-top indeed where first we had met one another. So now, after we had eaten the steaming potatoes, Trystie and Kit took the others home. It was only a mile and a half, and downhill all the way, so that Princess Honeypot's pumpkin coach—as Kit called the go-cart I had made, the fiery steeds being of course fairy ones and invisible to everybody but her highness and the coachman!—was no trouble.

The children got home long before us. On their way, they could see Jonas's cottage from a distance. It stands at the edge of a beech copse that, starting from the end of his little garden, spreads out into a wide coomb to which the Downs drop almost precipitously on each side. Then it runs steeply uphill as it narrows; and the trees, which are very fine on the level, become so small and tangled up with brambles and blackthorn and raspberry bushes that it is impossible to get through. Winding down the chalky road, the children heard the recorder's sweet music long before the old man came into view. He was sitting on the wood-chopping block beneath his cherry tree now full of red-black fruit. His knees were apart with his elbows resting on them; so that his back was bent and his head low down as he played his recorder to the little fluffy bobtail pup which sat before him with wondering eyes. As the children came near, he went into the cottage, but soon came back, wiping his eyes with a big red and green handkerchief.

He had seen the children and stood waiting for them in the little porch. He still held the recorder in his rheumatic and knotted fingers.

"Here, Master Kit," he called out, but with rather shaky words, "I've larned you and you've earned it. Take it hoäme. But if you doän't make no more progress, and if you doän't treat it kind, it'll come back to me—same as a bird, like. Doän't be afeared: it'll stop along o' you so long's you want it. There be a powerful lot more in it than you'll fetch out for a month of years."

Kit just leaped into the old man's arms, Trystie said. Jonas held him tight while the boy kissed him, then put him down and turned into the cottage without another word.

We had thought Kit would be tired enough to go straight to bed. But he could not forget his creatures, and must first go to the gable-platform, taking them their usual supper, though there was, of course, no bull's-eye to set upon Crickety's piece. He must also give them just one tune and see what they would do with the recorder's music. Perhaps it would comfort them and help them to behave nicely to one another.

He found them all in their proper places. In the dim light—for the sun was gone down—they looked as if butter wouldn't melt in their mouths, as Jonas says when Curdie puts on his most innocent expression after some secret escapade. Kit set their suppers before them, spoke to them as though they were rather sickly children, wondered whether they were going to have the chicken-pox or anything to account for their bad behaviour, and then sat down to play his mother's *good-night* song to them:

"Good night! pretty one,
Sweet happy night;
With the fairies dance and run
In the moonlight!

"Good night! sleepy head,
Sleep through the dark—
Sleep until the morning red
Wakes up the lark."

As he sat leaning against an upright supporting the roof, his legs stretched straight in front of him, he found his pipe going so sweetly that he hardly touched the tabor. But the absurdity of piping pretty words to these creatures seems to have struck him, for he then sang a verse of his own made up on the spot:

"Good night! uglies all,
Topsy-turvy night!
Tumble up, big and small,
Every one a fright!"

The occasion, however, was too important for nonsense. So he began, in some excitement, I am sure, to play the old recorder.

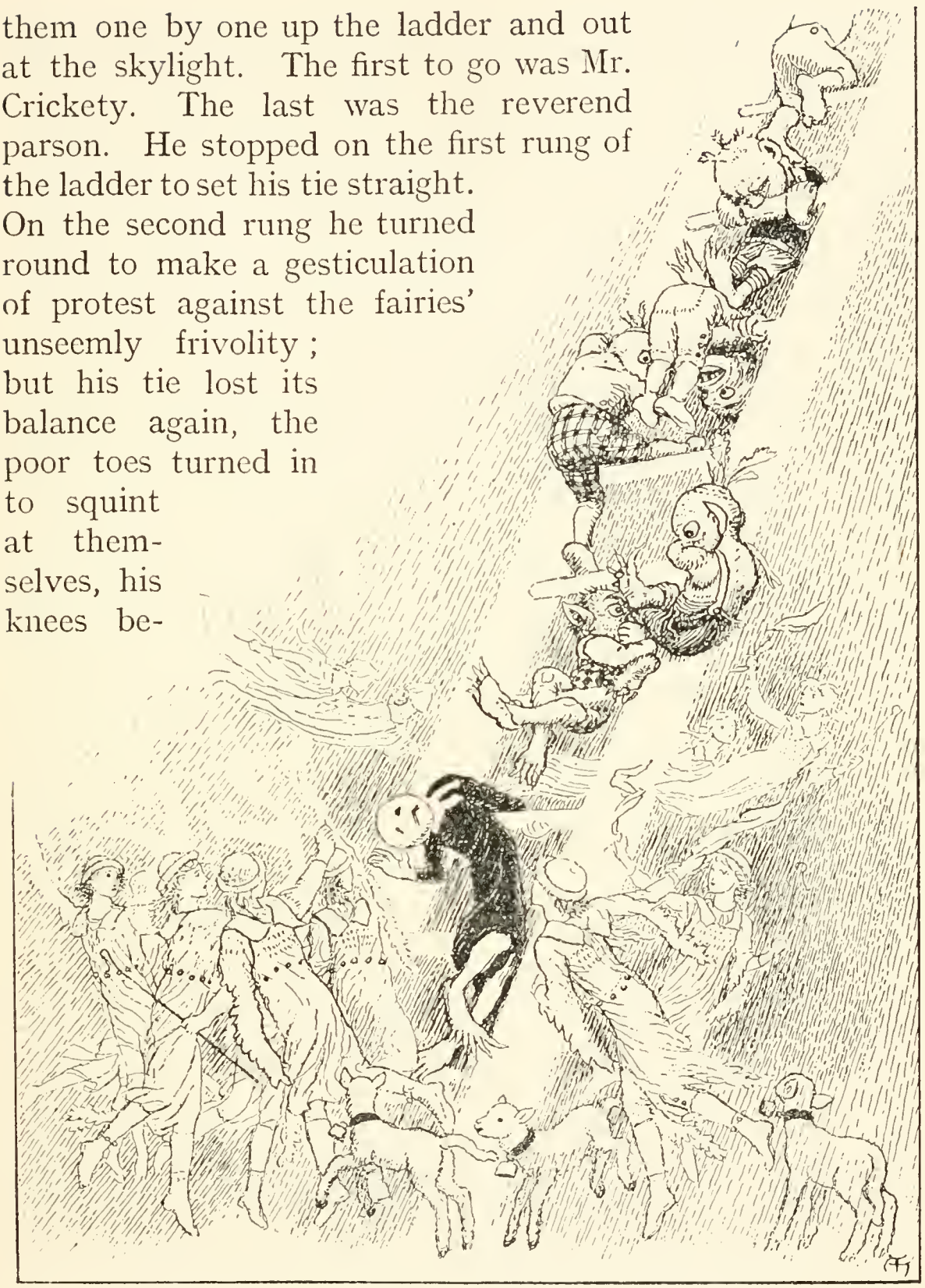
Kit's fingers immediately seemed to go of themselves, and he thought there must be a nightingale singing in the rafters with him. Soon he could not tell whether he or the bird were making most of the music. The moon rose and shone through the many-coloured skylight. The shadows danced on the floor in colours as bright as if it were daylight. A puff of wind blew in from somewhere and raised a thin cloud of dust. Then through this dust shone two parallel rays of white light sloping down from the skylight to the floor; and, somehow or other, Kit saw bars across

the two rays, so that they made a ladder going right up and through the jewel-like window. The gay-coloured shadows now danced a real morris-dance, the "Shepherd's Hey" which Kit knew so well;[1] but the ribbons on their sticks and the bells on their legs and the gay-coloured kerchiefs which they waved, made it difficult to see what shapes the shadows were taking. Certainly they were little people—shepherd children all, he thought. Then he heard the tiniest sheep-bells tinkling and a few gentle baas; and he was sure some of the dancers were frisky lambs, though our own were then all full grown. Still Kit piped, still he watched; and now he beat the time soft and loud on his tabor. Soon the most extraordinary thing of all happened. The floor was suddenly bright with moonlight. The skylight was lifted and the wind blew down bringing with it the scent of lime blossoms, always sweetest in moonshine. The moon-ray ladder was clearer than ever, the dust blown away. The little people were dancing madly round and round the row of Kit's ugly figures, flicking them with their kerchiefs, and shaking their belled ankles in their faces. An outer ring of dancing lambs was keeping pace, frisking and pirouetting and baaing with glee. Outside all, between his feet and the dancers, sat quite quietly on their haunches a pair of minute bobtailed sheep-dogs, looking wise enough to enjoy the children's fun, but too responsible to share it.

One by one up stumbled the swedes and carrots and potatoes; and, last of all, the parsnip. The dancers drove

[1] We have done a great deal to revive the old morris-dancing and folk-songs in our village, and have seen such happiness come from it that more than one gramophone and music-hall song are banished. We owe this happy revival to Mr. Cecil J. Sharp, who has rediscovered these almost forgotten things. Posterity is going to bless him for many ages.

them one by one up the ladder and out at the skylight. The first to go was Mr. Crickety. The last was the reverend parson. He stopped on the first rung of the ladder to set his tie straight. On the second rung he turned round to make a gesticulation of protest against the fairies' unseemly frivolity; but his tie lost its balance again, the poor toes turned in to squint at themselves, his knees be-



gan to double under him, he slipped ignominiously with one rung of the ladder between his legs, and then tumbled on to the floor. The dancers, however, cared nothing for accidents and would not listen either to excuses or sermons. Up he had to get in double-quick time; and though his white tie was now cutting half through his neck, he had to scamper up the ladder on all fours, and so after the other rascals! Up he stumbled and sprawled, followed by the fairies and the sheep and the dogs.

Then Kit understood. He jumped up, put his own pipe in the pocket of his smock, swung his tabor across his back and followed. He held in one hand the recorder and in the other his little crook.

O yes, the ladder was all right, big and strong enough for Kit and shimmering with moonshine! The skylight too was wide open and quite as big as it ought to be. The ash-leaves and boughs also he saw waving and full of dancing colours, but ten times bigger than usual—though there was nothing very strange in this! Up the ladder of course he went and through the skylight—quite an ordinary and obvious thing to do after playing such a fairy pipe as the recorder, not to mention having made one himself good enough for Pigwidgeons.

CHAPTER VI

The Peppermint Bull's-eye again—Crickety explains—Kit is nearly afraid, but not of Pigwidgeons—The Lark's Nest

KIT had to go carefully and could not keep up with the people he was following. The light was dim and heavy clouds must have hidden the moon. He could hardly see what was underfoot, except that it was all green as grass. Every few steps he would fall down into chasms and holes. Yet he would not stop to think whether he was hurt, but would climb up and run on. In this way he managed not to lose the others, who kept disappearing and then coming into sight again in the most unexpected places. There could not be much difference in size now between himself and his Pigwidgeon folk, though the little shepherds were certainly smaller than himself. The sheep all looked like lambs. Their bells still tinkled, but further and further away. There was no other sound at all. The only thing that seemed to him quite unusual was the bounciness of the ground he trod on. Even when he did not fall, the ground would sink with each step; and then, as if with a spring, it would give him a gentle jerk that made his next step almost a jump. Yet it didn't feel exactly unsafe—only uncertain and annoying because he was constantly slipping into the gaps, and the bounciness was most unequal. Presently he got on firmer ground; and, though now it seemed to sway gently to and fro, up and down, the bounci-

ness ceased. The path too was much plainer, but black and very lumpy. Smaller paths joined this one from right and left. When at last the moon appeared again, Kit thought he must be walking along the boughs of a giant tree and towards its trunk—was it the ash ?—and that the bounciness of the cross country was due to its irregular layers of leaves on the strong twigs.

Kit would have looked into this possibility, but at the very moment when the moon came out as big round as his hoop, a strange odour of peppermint filled the air, and an awful creature pounced upon him from behind a shimmering green hill. It barred his path and made the most shocking grimace the boy had ever beheld—far worse than any he had given his own little people in the gable-loft. Its eyes were as crooked and ill-matched as sneaking could make them. It grinned like a mandril and showed the horridest yellow tusks. The grin grew and gaped ; but it came back again like elastic just in time to prevent the top half of the creature's head from being cut right across by the smile and falling off. It was actually because the creature so very nearly grinned too far that Kit began laughing instead of feeling afraid. This made all the difference, and Kit could hardly stop laughing when he saw the creature was only old Crickety, with his brass breastplate and red buttons.

" I told them so," said the Pigwidgeon, with a curt nod, as though he wouldn't be one bit more respectful than he'd got to be. " I told them you would."

" Would what ? " asked Kit, when he managed to check his laughter, and, with child-like courtesy, offering his hand to shake.

" Sniggle," the creature answered, ignoring Kit's offer of

"The creature nearly grinned too far"

friendliness ; " they said I couldn't shockle you-- not after that guzzly bull's-eye."

" I only wanted to be friends, Crickety," said Kit, feeling as if he ought to be sorry, but hardly understanding the creature's words.

" Friends—that's it ! I knew it. And please call me *mister*—not so chummy," the ugly thing exclaimed bitterly, edging further and further away. " Nice and friendly ! Call it a bull's-eye and let me break my teeth on it ! Mouth's full of them. And then sniggle ! "

" What does sniggle mean, please, *Mr.* Crickety ? " asked the child, laughing again at the funny word, and at calling him *mister.*

" You ought to know when you're at it every moment. Sniggled at me when I tried to shockle you. And I tried it on parson too—made *his* tie wriggle—chattered all *his* teeth out—smiled sickly—rolled over. O yes, Parson was shockled ! But *you* only sniggled. You've *got* to be shockled, Master Kit, before we can google your eyes out."

Kit was beginning to understand the fellow's speech ; but it was as much as he could do not to laugh again. He didn't feel one bit afraid of being shockled—which he understood by this time was feeling afraid. The Pigwidgeon put his hand to his mouth and threw something out. " There go more of my blessed teeth," he exclaimed, sucking away at his peppermint.

" I'm so sorry," said Kit.

" It don't *taste* bad," was the reply. " I'll boggle it yet. Plenty more teeth—cut and come again—and it *is* peppermint—worth a guzzly fortune ! Don't tell Parson I've got it : might make *him* friendly." Then he looked suddenly behind him, as if afraid of something.

" Don't you *want* to be friends with him ? " asked the boy, looking ahead to keep the fairy people in sight.

Then Crickety whispered hoarsely into his ear, his very words redolent of peppermint, " Friend means danger. If any one wants to shake hands, safer to boggle him on the nose. Then they don't sniggle ! "

" But what do you want my eyes for ? " asked Kit, as though it were all a good joke.

" Why, because they're good for nothing," said Crickety very rudely.

" O, but they are ! " exclaimed Kit, looking up at the brilliant stars as they twinkled in and out among the leaves.

" There you are ! " was the rejoinder ; " what do you want to look up in that sky for ?—nothing there—it's dangerous—lose your way ! " said the Pigwidgeon.

" That's not true," said Kit firmly ; " Father finds his way by the stars ! "

" Snouts ! " sneered Crickety with his bitter smile.

Kit didn't trouble his head to understand, for he was thinking about the big stars and trying to realize what sort of country he was in.

" What's underneath ? " he asked.

" Nothing at all—*nothing*," answered Crickety, as if he must not allow there could possibly be anything—" unless dead larks in their holes—nests *you* call them."

" They're *not* dead," exclaimed Kit indignantly, " they sit on their eggs. They fly up every morning to sing to the sunrise ! "

" Snouts ! " again said Crickety positively and flinging a few more teeth away. He had not yet got through his peppermint. " When they stop their nasty twittering they're dead, I tell you—dead as ashes. It's a fresh lot comes up—

like teeth. They're always at it with their hullabalooings—can't snoggle after three o'clock amen "—did he mean a.m. ?—" not to say in peace. Worse than your recorder. Blow larks and recorders, I say, and give *me* peppermint bull's-eyes. How did you google *them ?* Snouts ! wouldn't I snoggle guzzlily if I could google all the larks' beady eyes out !—and all the bulls' too ! "

This word *guzzly* was the only adjective the creature had for approval. If he wanted to praise anything, he spoke of it as if it tasted good. Kit thought *guzzly* was just a very ugly pig-word. Finding the conversation rather stupid, Kit took out his own little pipe—not the recorder—and began to play. He wanted to see what would happen. But, O dear ! nothing but screechy came ; and, what was worse, he found it helped Crickety to sing a song that was all crooked. Kit remembers the words perfectly. His memory is much better for poetry than the multiplication table—" because there's sense in it," he says. When he first repeated the song to me his face was aflame with indignation, and he made me promise never to tell Honeypot about it.

" There's nothing at all in the sky up above
But moonshine and spangles and sparks ;
There's nothing below but dead ashes of love
In the nests of the twittering larks.
O, dancing with singing birds all in a row—
Dancing and singing are Pigwidgeons' woe !

" There's nothing whatever to keep us alive
But Fear in his Creaky old Cart :
He fills it with bones when he's out for a drive,
To stuff up the hole in his heart.
O, springtime and summer they come and they go—
Springtime and summer are Pigwidgeons' woe !

"It's Fear who protects us, and bids us believe
That friendship means best-dog-on-top;
At pity he'll gobble, and honey-love thieve—
And he jumps with a creak and a hop!
O, blackbirds and robins and Christmassy snow—
Blackbirds and robins are Pigwidgeons' woe!

"Of Love and such nonsense he bids us beware,
For they shame our best champion—himself:
'They only love life who live lonely, and care
For friends,' he says, 'safe on the shelf.'
O, tom-tits and babies, they come and they grow—
Tom-tits and babies are Pigwidgeons' woe!

"No Pigwidgeons ever sit two on a bough—
For its lickings and kickings and tweaks:
When larks mount the sky, it's because of the row
Of the chicky birds' twitter and squeaks.
O, kisses and cuddles and hearts all aglow—
Kisses and cuddles are Pigwidgeons' woe!"

After the first verse, Kit felt so miserable that he stopped piping and put his fingers in his ears. But now the song was taken up by hundreds of others. Their voices were so screechy that there was no music in them, and so loud that stopping his ears was no use. He shut his eyes tight, as if that would help. But when the song was done, the Pigwidgeons began to yell at one another about him.

"It's coming," said one; "he's turned guzzly pale and his eyes are bulgy, though he thinks they're shut. It's coming right enough—shockle is."

"Got the spoons ready to google them? They're fine guzzly eyes."

"Shuts his eyes because he's half shockled of being quite shockled! Cockalorum! Pigasnorum! He's done for!"

But Kit was nothing of the sort. He opened his eyes and saw monkey-like creatures all about with faces far more hideous than his own swedes and parsnips. Their coats were red and blue and green—the jolly colours of his gable skylight, but now looking bad and horrible.

Even now Kit was not afraid. I imagine he was too angry and too disgusted for that. So he took out his recorder and began to play. The first note of it must have made him feel very happy, because the coarse music ceased and the vile creatures got further from him, constantly looking over their shoulders as if afraid of something: was it the Creaky Cart? He played on, tune after tune—or rather song after song, for the recorder's music was always singing. Soon he heard nightingales singing above, sheep-bells began to tinkle behind, and a flock of the curliest, softest sheep came romping about him. Then followed the fairy shepherds and ploughboys dancing round about their sheep, in and out, and so merrily that the sheep all frisked and frolicked, and stood on their hind legs and joined their little cloven hoofs together and baa'd and shook their merry bells. The two dogs sat down again, one just in front of each of Kit's outstretched legs.

But very soon they all began to scamper and dance away. Kit followed, but could not keep pace with them, though he raced his best. They ran up a steep winding hill. It was all bright and sunny here, with pastures and buttercups and rosy apple trees all about.

Suddenly the fairy folk were all lost to his sight by a bend in the road. When Kit got round it, nothing was to be seen but a little gate in a high wall. Had they gone through it? Or over the wall? Everything now was

"Baa'd and shook their merry bells"

so absolutely silent that Kit was very nearly afraid he might be really beginning to be afraid—but not of the *beastly* Pigwidgeons—yes, they *were* beastly, and he was sure he was right to say it !—not of them, but of his all-aloneness. If he couldn't catch up with them he knew he shouldn't be able not to cry. He must push through the gate. It wouldn't budge and there was no latch ; but he saw a cord hanging by the gate. It must be a bell. He would pull that, and then if no one opened the gate, he would sit down and play the recorder to keep from crying.

He pulled. There sounded a sudden sharp-toned bang, rather than clang—so loud and quick that it was almost like an explosion of music. He held on to the cord, but felt that he had pulled it off, and that he himself was slowly falling down and down and down. Still he held : it kept him from falling too fast. He heard a distant harsh voice singing :

> "There's nothing below but dead ashes of love
> In the nests of the twittering larks."

Still he was going down, still he held. He did not fall, because even now he wasn't a bit afraid ; and so, quite naturally, soon found himself quietly walking on soft turf. The huge silver moon was still shining. He began to shiver with cold and excitement. He saw a great curved wall by him made of interwoven dry grass and moss and big downy feathers. He stood on tiptoe, holding on to a projecting head of spear-grass, and looked over the edge. There he saw a great lark sitting on her eggs. The long cord he still held had something dragging at the end of it. He must look and see what it was presently, but must first pipe a tune to Mrs. Lark. He tied the cord to his belt so as not to run

any risk of losing it. Then he sat down and played a song, which he certainly did not blow into the recorder, and which, quite as surely, had never come out of it before :

"Peace pipes in the sky,
Hope sings in my breast :
When he's up on high,
My mate sings the best !

"The moon may outfly
The clouds of the West ;
Her wide-open eye
Peeps into my nest.

"But no lark will sigh
For the moon—a cold guest !
She's queen—but can't buy
The warm eggs in my nest ! "

"Why, that's Jonas's fairy recorder ! " the big bird exclaimed in her sweetest voice. Then she looked over the edge of her nest : "O, it's you, is it, Kit ? You look tired and cold, child. Why ! you've got Robin's air-ball, to be sure ! I'm glad, because he'll want it soon now, although it's burst. Climb up and creep under my wing. But mind the dear eggs ! "

Kit was glad enough to get into the warm nest. He cuddled down under the bird's wing as she shook and folded it over him. Her big brown eyes looked lovingly into his, and he fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER VII

Kit's strange Sleep—The Squirrel in Jonas's Cherry Tree—Bang!—Kit wakes up very hungry

IT was such a wonderful summer night that we, the children's parents, stayed on the Downs longer than we had intended. The moon was so silvery white and so big that the sleeping earth seemed alive with mystery and secrets—like a child on Christmas Eve holding his eyes shut and trying hard to go to sleep, yet unable to keep his thoughts off Santa Claus and to-morrow's joys. The dear mother, who was as happy as a child to-night, thought she could hear whisperings and dancing feet in the fairy rings. On a little dew-pond we passed there were tiny ripples and lapping waves, though we could feel no breath of air. We saw, one after another, minute, almost transparent things scudding across the water, dancing up and down on the ripples, looking like fairy boats just because we could hardly see them. Indeed we could not be sure that they actually existed till the mother—running great risk of offending the little gentry!—caught one that got stranded at our feet, and saw it was a full-rigged ship of thistledown. It was indeed a strange and lovely night.

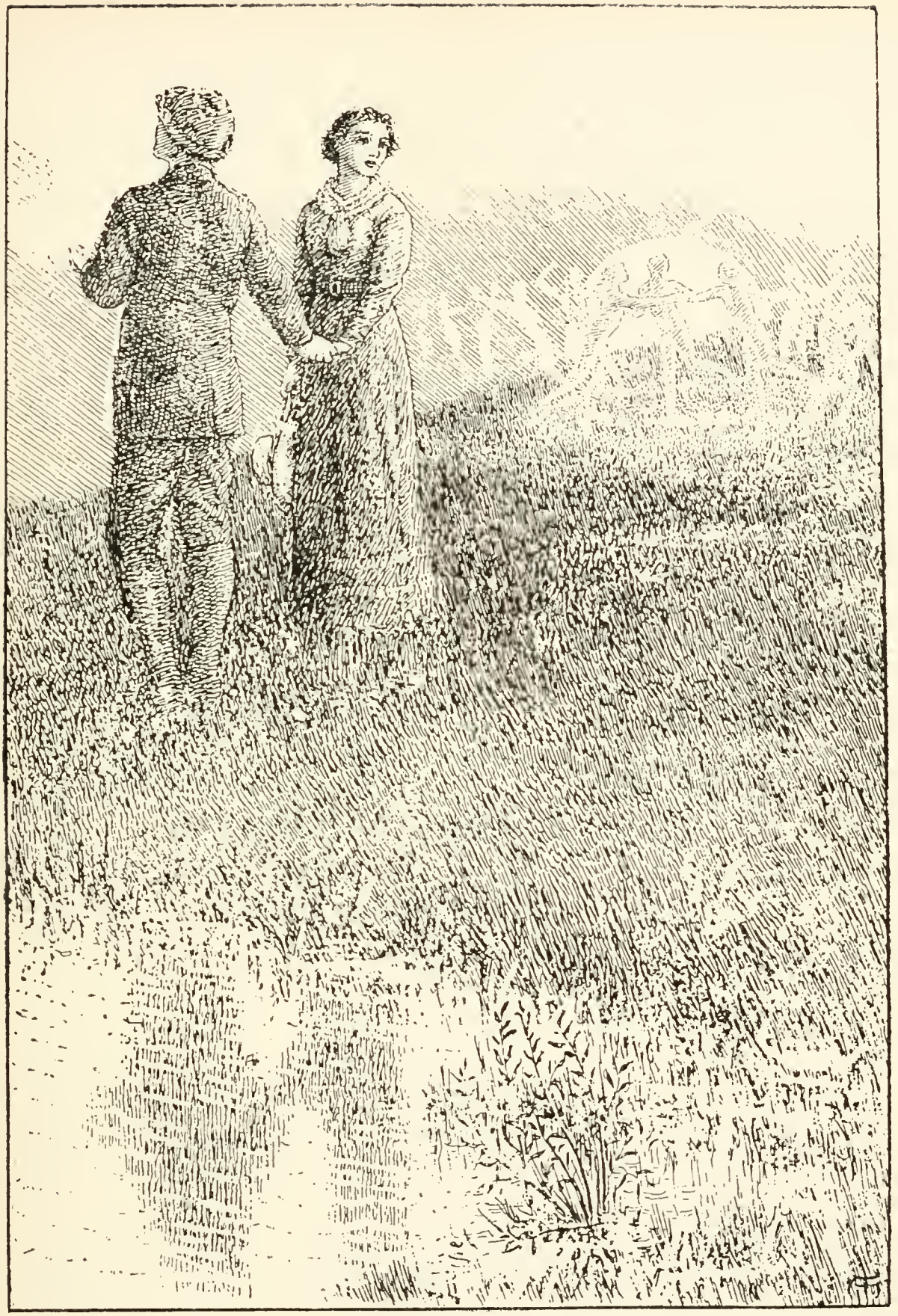
When we got home—nearly ten o'clock it was—we found Trystie sitting by Robin's cot. He had a toothache, but was better now, though he would not lie still unless she held her hand to his cheek and told him her best story. As

we were both hungry, I went to the kitchen to see what supper there was, while the mother went to look at the sleeping boys. To her dismay Kit was not in his bed. Trystie, when asked, said she had forgotten him, as she had to do so much for Robin ; she supposed he had got his milk, which she left in the kitchen for him, and had gone up tired to his own little attic without saying good night. Then she remembered he had gone into the barn first.

But that must have been two hours before. We both ran round the yard to the barn and found one door ajar. The moonlight was dimly pouring through the little shut skylight, though it was dark enough down in the barn itself. As I lit the lantern I carried, the mother ran past me and up the ladder. I followed. Although moonlight has so little converse with colour, all the greens and reds and blues of those small diamond panes were flickering over the floor, as if the ash leaves outside were shaking in a high wind. Then we found Kit lying on his back, his right hand holding the recorder, and his arm tucked under his head. His mother called him gently—she says you should never wake a child by touching him ; but he took no notice, beyond muttering in his sleep very indistinctly,

" I *am* being very careful of the eggs, Mrs. Lark, so do let me snoggle again. I wasn't—trulyality really—I wasn't a tiny weeny bit shockled. But I just *did* sniggle ! "

The child was talking such utter nonsense that we both felt quite afraid. He would not wake up for our gentle calling of him. So I thought I had better lift him into my arms and down the ladder : perhaps we could get him into bed without waking him. But first I held the lantern over him. In his left hand he held tightly a string ; one end of it was fastened to his belt, and the other was attached to



"Dancing feet in the Fairy Rings"

a burst air-ball! What a strange thing! Then his mother exclaimed aloud, "Shepherd"—she always calls me that—"he has a lot of brown downy feathers in his hair and all over him—larks', they look like! He was saying something about Mrs. Lark's eggs. What does it mean?". She added, "His Pigwidgeons are all gone too, but without their supper!"

Meanwhile I had lifted the boy still sleeping on to my left arm, with his head over my shoulder, and so carried him down the ladder. The mother followed with the lantern, the recorder and the little crook. He kept on muttering, "*Let* me snoggle, please, Mrs. Lark. It's guzzly under your wing. I shall tell father I wasn't shockled; but I'm terrible afraid mother 'll think I was rude—sniggling so. O, there go the sheep-bells. 'Tomtits and babies are Pigwidgeons' woe!' Mrs. Lark, may I say *beast* now? No! I'll ask Mother."

We put him into his mother's bed without his eyes opening once. We took his clothes off, put his nightshirt on and tucked him up. Then his mother felt his head and neck and said he was not feverish. I slept on the parlour couch that night.

In the morning the doctor came. He said there was nothing the matter with the child; but he was over-tired and wanted a dose. We gave it him and kept him in bed all day, thinking it better to let him have his sleep out. At dinner-time we woke him, but he would eat nothing, saying sleepily, with a funny smile, that he wanted to snoggle again. In his sleep he would still talk a little—but less and less as the day passed, and latterly only about Mrs. Lark. He came down for his tea, as I shall tell presently; but his mother insisted upon keeping him in her bed the next night also. I fancy she was feeling just a little bit annoyed

with Mrs. Lark, whoever she might be! But she kept the feathers in a big envelope, and we thought it better not to ask him where he had caught Robin's blue air-ball, or how he got covered with the feathers.

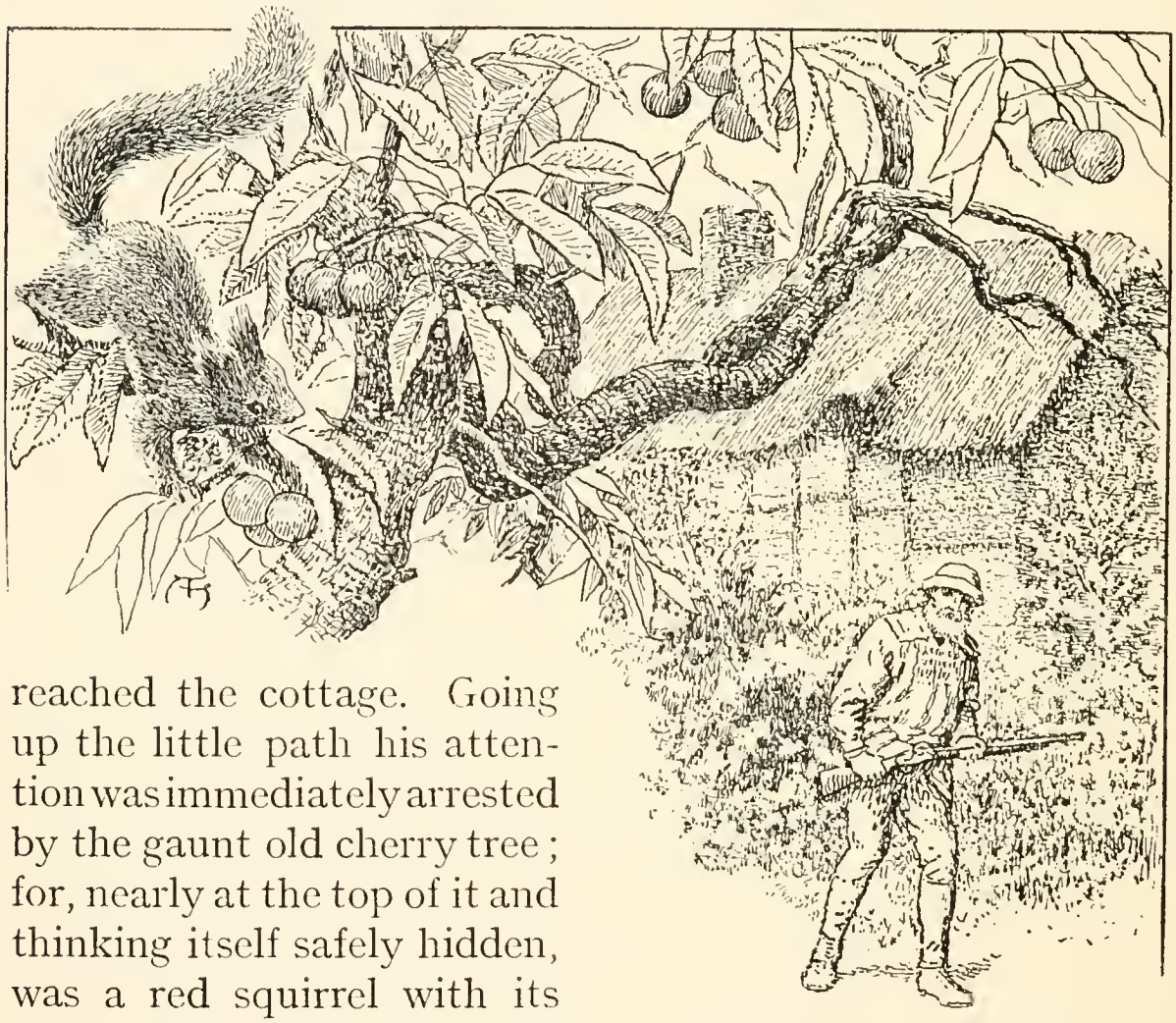
It was early that same afternoon, while Kit was still sleeping, that Davie ran over to see Jonas. When he saw the remains of Robin's air-ball, which he knew Kit had somehow got out of the tree, two silent tears found their way out of bounds. He was never surprised at any wonderful achievement or escapade of his big brother's. So he said nothing, but rolled the string carefully round the blue rag—all that was left of the former blue glory—and tucked it away in one of his smock pockets. He must break the dreadful news very carefully to Robin.

Davie was a dreamy child—less impulsive in thought and action than Kit, but, if anything, quicker in feeling. His eyes were blue like Kit's, but his hair was darker and straight, and he had not the elder boy's quickly changing colour. He always wanted to think a wrong thing out before any instinct for redress asserted itself. So he was slower in getting angry, less instant in showing his love and gratitude. He would nurse an injury too, not easily forgiving a wrong, especially when done to some one he loved. Though Bully Butcher Broom had stopped his petty tyrannies since Kit had fiercely punched his head and come home with a black eye, Davie meant never to be friends with the enemy. Davie outwardly demanded less, but, as his mother said, needed her kisses just as much as Kit.

We had told Davie about the feathers in Kit's hair, thinking he might know how they came there. He took it as quite an ordinary thing and nodded his head know-

ingly. Yet I think he was glad to go and tell Jonas all about it.

This was another glorious midsummer day, lying still in the baking sun. Everything looked happy and sleepy. None of Jonas's grandchildren were about when Davie



reached the cottage. Going up the little path his attention was immediately arrested by the gaunt old cherry tree; for, nearly at the top of it and thinking itself safely hidden, was a red squirrel with its huge tail on its back, sitting up and eating cherries as fast and extravagantly as it could, yet all the time keeping watch in opposite directions with its little black eyes. One by one, it quickly plucked the cherries, turning each rapidly round and round in its little paws to find the sweetest spot to begin on. Then it would in utmost haste nibble away a wide equator round each

luscious world, throw the cherry down before it was half eaten, and pluck another one. Davie watched it spell-bound and immovable. Just then Jonas came home and saw the child watching. He looked up into the cherry tree, grunted only a "humf!" and stepped quietly into the cottage. In a moment he came back with his gun, saying, "I'll larn you to clim my cherry tree and mommick my cherrises, you liddle imp!" Bang! went the gun: down tumbled the squirrel. It picked itself up quickly, darted away among the peas and cabbages, and then fell on its side.

Davie was not slow in action now. He ran to the little creature, picked it up tenderly, gathered it comfortably into his smock, said no word to Jonas, but sped home as fast as his legs could carry him, and too white to cry. Fortunately I had just come indoors for my tea. Davie held out his smock, now stained with a few streaks of red, to let me see the still soft-furred thing. Its little eyes were blinking and looked as if it were just waking up to an amusing situation; but it did not move. I took it in my hand to find where the hurt lay, as Davie said:

"Jonas shot him with his gun up in the cherry tree, eating. Mother, if cherries was made only for people, what's squirrels for?"

The mother said to me that she could not understand Jonas at all; but to the child:

"No, Davie boy. Cherries were made for squirrel people —weren't they, father?—before human people found out they were so good to eat. But Jonas thinks they are *all* his because the tree is in his garden."

I soon found the little leg bones were all sound, but the shot had torn the flesh on the creature's hind quarters.

There was a silence of a few minutes, as I was washing away the dark clots from the brush and the wound. The squirrel lay quite still. Presently Davie said slowly in his oracular way :

" Teacher says it's wind and rain and sun just like earth what grows things. Wind and rain and sun ain't all Jonas's. So *all* the cherries *can't* be his'n 'cos the garden is."

It was often Davie's way, when he was excited, to adopt the style of speech of his humbler school-fellows. He was now watching the squirrel, still lying on its side. I was afraid its backbone was injured and that it was paralysed. Its eyes were now shut. I put it down on the tea-table, Davie still watching with big, expectant eyes. Suddenly the child exclaimed in a whisper :

" Mother, it wunk at me ! "

Its eyes were indeed open again. Suddenly it sat up on its haunches and tried a little leap, but fell again. I thought it would die, and so told Davie we must leave it quietly alone. We got a box for it, put some fresh hay in it, a little piece of bread and some cherries of our own, and carried it into the tool shed. I explained to Davie how all the tree-creatures knew best how to deal with their own sorrows, and how people, thinking woodland troubles were the same as their own, often did the wrong thing. Then Davie, on his own determination, took the cat, who was lying curled up in the sun outside the porch, and tied a bit of string with a reef-knot round her neck as carefully as possible so as to hurt neither her neck nor her feelings. Then he carried her in his arms and fastened her to the fender in the parlour ; and we came in for tea.

Davie spoke never a word all the time, but ate and drank heartily. Before we had done, Kit burst into the room :

"Tea-time? Why, where's the day gone? O Mother, I've had *such* experiences. I've been miles and miles. I've found the land where the Pigwidgeons and Fairies live, and I'm going again; and they couldn't—they couldn't—something me—but I can't remember it all—only it wasn't a dream; and I'm so awfully hungry!"

He was quite himself again, and for a time we heard no more of his absurd words. Nor did he at present remember his adventures. That he had had some very extraordinary ones he was quite sure, and this for three reasons: first, his Pigwidgeons were all gone from the gable loft; second, he found more feathers and some lichen moss on his clothes; third, there was the burst air-ball and its string! The air-ball was certainly Robin's, because it could no longer be seen fixed in the ash tree like a captured maiden patiently waiting for her champion.

The next morning before breakfast Davie went to look for his squirrel; it was gone! But so were the bread and the cherries, all except the stones; by which we knew that the cat was not responsible, but that the squirrel had recovered and had scampered away home to its own nest and young family in the tree-tops.

Of this squirrel and its belongings wonderful things are yet to be told.

CHAPTER VIII

Thistledown and Moonshine—The Fairy Boat Race—Trystie sets out upon her Quest

I SHOULD have mentioned that while I was examining the squirrel when Davie first brought it in, Trystie had been a very intent watcher. It was never her way to speak much, unless telling the children fairy stories, when her eyes would be gently closed, as though she were in quite another world. Davie and I, as I have said, took the little creature to the tool-shed and fitted up its bed, so that Trystie and Robin were left alone with the mother.

"I wonder, Robin," said the latter as she cut and spread the honey-bread for tea, "whether he will get well again."

"He's broke his leg, I know," replied the little boy, "'cos he wants Davie to have him. I saw him wunk too."

"But perhaps squirrels mean something quite different when they wink," argued his mother, "who knows? I wonder what Trystie thinks."

Our big girl thought for a minute, till she had filled three of the willow-pattern mugs with milk. Then she shut her eyes, as if looking ahead beyond things, and said merely:

"It *looked* like a fairy squirrel. If he is, he'll get quite well and go back for more cherries. Then some day he'll come and talk to Davie."

Then Davie and I came in, and I cut the little slice of bread

for the squirrel and Davie fetched the cherries. Then we both took them back to the shed. Davie also, as I have said, had to tie up the " Proosian " cat, as the people call our soft and sly Persian tabby.

That same evening we were all happy again because Kit was wide awake and Robin's toothache forgotten. When the children were all abed—Kit, as I have said, again in his mother's—the mother sat down to her spinning and told Trystie all about the wonderful moonlight and the pretty doings on the dew-pond. This child—who came to us when she was eleven years old, instead of no age at all as is the ordinary way with children—is such a companion to the mother, that sometimes, as I sit with them tired after my day's work, and perhaps whittling away at a wooden spoon or carving a bowl, I wonder which is really the older—Trystie so wise and maidenly mother-like ; or the mother so light-hearted and young when things are going well with the children and me.

" Wasn't it rather dangerous, Trystie," I asked in mock-serious tone, " catching one of their ships ? I only wish I could have caught them all, and stopped their seeding all over our fields. I'd risk making the fairies angry ! "

" I don't think the fairies are ever made angry," she replied, as if taking me seriously, " unless you *want* to be unkind. Don't you see, Father, you only *thought* it was only thistledown."

" But so it was, Trystie," expostulated the mother playfully.

Then Trystie shut her eyes, looked ahead beyond things, and thrust her head a trifle forwards, as if it must follow her eyes. After a moment's silence, she said in a sort of thinking way, and as if rather to herself than to us :

"But—but—was there ever in all the world any such thing as *only-thistledown,* or *only* anything else? I wonder!"

When the mother, a minute or two later, went to fetch Prince Tom Tit, who had started crying, she gave Trystie a good hug in passing. She knew what the child was thinking—that everything beautiful always means—to everybody who loves it—so very much more than can be seen. Yet not everybody knows that thistledown may be fairy fleets on a dew-pond or flocks of fairy sheep on the windy Downs, as well as dandelion chicks that have bidden goodbye to their mother before they are even hatched! The mother quickly returned with the baby. With him she brought also a little gay, old-fashioned bag-purse made of beads, with pink and silver roses sprawling all over a pale blue ground. It had belonged to her grandmother, and was greatly admired by the children, who thought it must be magical. The mother gave it to Trystie. "For your very own," she said. "It's the sort of purse to carry fairy-money in, I'm sure; and you can begin by putting your lucky sixpence in it!" The child's delight in the lovely possession was too much for words. As the mother sat down on the creepie stool close to me and rocked the baby to sleep again, Trystie took the spinning-wheel and the purse to the window where the cooler night air was sweet after the sunny day. But she did no spinning—unless, indeed, the moon was her distaff, the silvery light her flax, and the gay little purse her spindle! For she turned the bead-woven flowers round and round to see their magic glitter in the moon's rays; and then, with a length of thread from the real spindle, she fastened the purse round her neck and hid it inside her frock. Meantime the mother sang this little

song—the sort of thing that would often come to her unbidden when a baby needed rocking:

"O the wind and the moon, and the thistledown flying!
The nightingales sing though the mothers be sighing:
The dew-pond is changed to a faëry sea
And there's ships and there's sailors for Baby and me!

"O the moon on the Downs and the wind all a-blowing!
Sweet dreams on the lambs gentle sleep is bestowing:
The dew-pond is changed to a billowy sea,
And home is the haven for Baby and me!"

It was clear that a feeling of mystery and loveliness was in possession of us all that shining night, so peaceful with deep dreaminess. We sat a little longer without more words than such as are never spoken, and then went to bed.

As I have said, that night I was to sleep again on the roomy old couch—"the family coach," Kit called it—in the parlour. The casements were open on two sides, and the wind blew across me in gentle puffs of sweetness that seemed to insist upon play rather than sleep. At any rate, I did not want to close my eyes. Life was so good that it needed some thinking about. The thoughts that came to me were worth cherishing, for they were all about my dear ones upstairs. I was imagining how their souls lay fast asleep, while their good hearts, never resting, were at work all through the night like devoted brownies taking all responsibility—I was thinking such and many other thoughts when I heard the latch of the heavy old door that opens into the porch. The noise was so slight that I thought I must be mistaken. Yet I looked into the garden and saw, slowly walking down the brick-path, a white figure, with

long straight black hair streaming down her back. It was Trystie, and nothing on but her nightgown! I did not call after her, not wishing to make any noise that would awaken the children. But I was up in a moment, got into my clothes and took my crook from its nail in the porch. I watched the child as she crossed the road and ran up the side of the field opposite where the wheat was already swelling into full, strong ears. She went so straight ahead, looking neither to right nor left, that I felt sure she was fast asleep. Before I got near her she was half-way up the beech coomb which starts from the wheatfield and quickly ascends by a steep winding path—we call it a *bostall*—on to the Downs. I was puzzled as to what I should do. I feared to wake the child by calling, and so, till I realized what she would be doing, was content to follow close behind. I had no fear of her taking cold, so warm was the night, so thick was her hair, and so strong and hardy was her constitution. The further up we went, the faster the child sped; till, reaching the soft turf, she seemed to fly like a bit of thistledown itself, scudding before the wind. Indeed I could not follow her close enough to keep her in sight. She disappeared at last behind a little knoll covered with gorse, whitethorn and bracken. Then, as she still went uphill, I caught sight of her standing for a moment on the skyline. With the moon to the north of her, she looked extraordinarily silvery and sylph-like against the sky; and her black hair was now blowing all about her like an aureole of shadows and thunder clouds. Then she disappeared again. But I felt quite sure she was making for the dew-pond we had been talking about. Thither I followed.

When I reached her, she was sitting near the edge of it,

by the side of a little thicket of gorse and bramble. Against the thicket had been driven by the wind a deep and high, shimmering mass of thistledown, the whole continually swaying to and fro as if in excited expectancy. Individual pieces would constantly break away, some flying off in the wind, some embarking upon the little pond. Trystie sat and seemed to watch, though I now saw that her eyes were closed. Still uncertain what I ought to do, I stretched myself out a few paces away from her ; with face resting in my hand and elbow planted on the turf, I watched the child and the thistledown.

Then things began—not to change, but to develop. I saw more than had appeared the night before. The water itself was magic in its transparency. There was a little island in the centre of the pond, which I had not seen before. It was wonderfully green, and clearly inhabited. Its outline was irregular with promontories and island off-shoots. It presented a hilly country, thickly dotted with irregular caves, out of which peeped all kinds of birds —thrushes, tits, blackbirds, wood-larks, turtle doves, and even nightingales, those shyest of all birds. They all seemed to be on the look-out for friends, and their beaks were pointing towards our end of the lake, where great numbers of fairy-winged people were gathered together. As I looked intently into the transparent water, because the caves seemed to go beneath the surface, I saw right down to the bottom of the lake or sea.

Presently I saw ten silvery boats in full oar and sail start together from the mainland. They were manned by the most exquisite winged people. These were so light of foot that they barely touched their decks. Often they would hover overboard to dip their toes in the spray-

scattering waves, and then fly back again to trim a sail, or put down the helm for tacking. It was a race—but such a happy one that nobody seemed to care who won, so long as some one of them did! And they were in real earnest too. If one ship fell behind, little sailors would fly across to it from all the others; some would lay hold of her bulwarks to help her onwards; some would crowd behind, and, puffing their cheeks out, looked as if they were blowing the ship along. But they appeared hardly to succeed, and were soon back again in their own ships. These were of all kinds and builds. Cutters, schooners, and full-rigged ships; Spanish galleons, gorgeous with colour and gold, Norse dragon-headed fighting galleys, Malay proas, Ceylon catamarans, Chinese junks, Venetian gondolas, and little ancient British coracles. Those without sails travelled quite as fast as the full-rigged ships. It was a long though merry race—perhaps three miles, though I had not thought the little dew-pond could have been so long. As Trystie learned afterwards, the race was for one prize only, namely the happiness of being first to tell the Queen that her God-child was coming home in one of the Fairy Fleet she had sent to fetch her.

It is not easy to make these things intelligible to people who have not the fairy sense. To those who have, they are quite simple because they know that when once a person has had dealings with the fairies, size and distance and time and right-side-up are no longer the only points of importance. To fairy-sensible people whose heads are not hind-side before, it is obvious that in Fairyland a giant can creep through a mousehole—when some one shows him the way—just as easily as the Queen of them all showers love and blessing over the whole world from the deck of a fairy-

airy ship made of thistledown and moonshine. It all depends upon *how* you look at things—not upon how things look *to* you !

Well, the truth must be told, even when it seems impossible to believe it. As I lay on the turf by the side of this wind-swept, wave-tossing sea, I saw Trystie get up, looking so happy and merry, and run down to the bay where all that fairy crowd was waiting and watching the race. Her nightgown was like silver, and it shone through the black cloak of her beautiful hair. Her feet hardly touched the ground, though they ran with great dancing strides. O, she laughed merrily, you may be sure, as all the people came crowding about her. Then I saw the little fairy sea-port beyond where she stood. The quays were built of blocks of pearly stone, strong with age and worn with use, with golden rings to which fairy ships were made fast ; and capstans of black wood and silver fittings, and coils of silvery cord and piles of red nets ; and old blocks and green copper anchors all lying about. Round the quay and the harbour stood ancient fairy-houses, so homelike and staid with their high-pitched roofs dotted with dormer windows ; with their many over-hanging, strong-beamed stories ; with their windows all open like outstretched, welcoming arms to tempt the moonlight in and let out the downy people who were flying about quite at home and busy about highly important affairs.

Presently out of this peaceful harbour was towed by little feathery boats each manned by a bird-like rower—who feathered his oars most perfectly, of course !—the finest and jauntiest row-ship you ever saw. It was brought into the deep water by the side of which Trystie was still laughing and chatting with the others. Trystie just stepped

aboard, and sat down upon the one low seat on the poop. Then the rowers seized their oars and the sails were unfurled—they were all the colours of the rainbow and quite as bright as if in the sunlight.

As the distance increased I heard the sailors singing:

"Farewell and adieu to you, Thistledown Haven!
Farewell and adieu to you, Fairies so gay!
For we've orders to sail in the silvery moonlight,
But we'll meet you again next midsummer day.
We'll rant and we'll roar like true fairy sailors,
We'll rant and we'll roar on all the salt seas!
From Downland to Elf-land is a thousand full leagues,
But you're there, heave away, in a capful of breeze!

"Then heave away, ho! my jolly boy sailors!
Overboard, over, with parsons and tailors!
Heave away, hearties! and weigh your gold anchor,
Close-haul the square sails and up with the spanker!
We'll rant and we'll roar like rollicking sailors,
We'll rant and we'll roar like ghosts in the shrouds!
Then, ho! for the harbour where frolicsome pixies
Will beckon and chase us in thistledown crowds!"

The singing and the splashing of the oars died away in the distance, till at last I saw the ship stop at the island in the middle of the lake.

Then the moon was swallowed up by a monster black cloud and I saw no more.

CHAPTER IX

An important Person appears—So does Curdie—The Bead Purse—Trystie's happy Voyage—Her arrival at the Island.

SO much for what I saw. No one must believe all his eyes tell him if he is too lazy to see for himself. But when you use your eyes yourself, just to look through so that they let you yourself out and into the things they let you see, why, then you *must* believe. Otherwise there is no difference between believing and commonplace seeing. A cat may look at a king and will know him at once for a very grand person ; but it takes a pair of loving eyes to see that the grand person is something much more than a king —a good and tender-hearted man indeed. The cat *sees the king* all right, but a wise child's eyes make him *believe in the man.* If there were no such difference, everything would be just too stupid to be worth believing.

I stood up and rubbed my eyes. The black cloud unswallowed a bit of the moon again and I saw that the surface of the dew-pond, as I looked down upon it, was still covered by ripples that came lapping to my feet. The heap of thistledown was all blown away. I looked about for Trystie, wondering whether I had fallen asleep and if she had found her way home again. I gave a little shiver, rubbed my eyes and stooped to pick up my crook, the iron of which was coruscating with a blue glitter, although the moon had again disappeared. Then I saw

looking up at me a little fellow, standing no higher than my knee. He was dressed in close-fitting Lincoln green, with a scarlet pointed hood ending in a long tassel. He had a silver belt that shone with a light like my crook's, though brighter and more wavy.

He made me a bow and spoke with a delicious Irish brogue.

"It's meself, the Leprecaun—at your service, Sir Shepherd! Is it the fairy water you would be drinking and go after the pretty colleen?"

Then he laughed and ran to the top of the hill that here gently slopes down to the dew-pond. He was so quick that, but for his shining belt, I could hardly have kept him in sight. Then he seemed to lie down and to begin rolling down the grassy slope; and so fast that I could see nothing but his belt. It appeared to be unrolling towards me, one end remaining at the top of the hill. Its brightness grew more wavy and glittered more, spreading out as it came rippling towards me. It was a long belt indeed and had no ending—except at the beginning of it, as its owner once said to Trystie! It rushed and sparkled and began to sing like a brook dancing over mossy rocks and shiny pebbles. It came up to my feet and ran on into the dew-pond with a splash and a rush. The Leprecaun, as well as the fairy sea-port and the island, were nowhere to be seen.[1] I felt

[1] It may as well be explained at once, seeing that the mysterious mannikin has much to do with subsequent events, that a leprecaun is an Irish fairy who has wonderful duties and powers. He is the fairies' cobbler and sometimes makes shoes for very good boys and girls. He presides over springs and brooks and waterfalls so that they do his bidding. His presence in Downland is easily explained when we remember that the people in his own country have mostly been driven away over-seas, and that those who remain have sent their hearts away also with those they love. Having lost their hearts they have nothing left wherewith to believe in fairies and leprecauns. So old Ireland is not the place she was—and will be again some day, please God!

terribly thirsty, and was just putting my mouth down to drink when I remembered what might happen. I had more than once drunk fairy water before, when my need had been greater. It had, the first time, taken me into Fairyland and enabled me to find our Princess Honeypot who had been stolen. But I had promised my wife never to leave her again : indeed it would have been anguish to me to do so. That Trystie was safe I was quite sure. I pulled my mouth back from the water just in time. The brook, with its light and its music, vanished, and I found Curdie leaping upon me in the wildest joy because he had found me. So we went home—I still thirsty, but now rather for my own well-water than the fairy brook.

As I reached the farm, there was the mother waiting for me. It appeared that she too had heard the click of the latch and had come down the stair—only to find me gone. But for some ill-defined reason she went upstairs again for Trystie : she, of course, was gone also. It looked strange ! Curdie too could not be found, though he always sleeps in the kitchen. She called him and heard his bark far away. Kit came running down. He went to see if Curdie could be shut up in the barn, because his bark sounded like it. There he was sure enough, and up on the gable platform. He had climbed the ladder, but was hesitating how to get down again, though he would have jumped and risked a shaking, I think, if no ladder had been there. So Kit helped him down. The mother told the dog what the trouble was, and that he must fetch his master and Miss Trystie home. Away he sped and found me ; but not Trystie. It did not take me long to tell the mother and Kit the story ; yet the dawn was breaking by the time it got to the fairy brook of which I would not drink because of my promise.

We were too anxious about Trystie to go to bed again that early morning. Like most people, we did not yet trust or altogether believe in Fairyland, in spite of its being so near us. Indeed we could not feel positive that I had not been dreaming. At half-past three I roused the men—and we all went to search the Downs. Curdie had gone off again immediately he had brought me home, and we felt almost certain he would find Trystie and bring her back if it was possible. Again and again had we proved his sagacity when he was sent to find a lost sheep or a strayed child; and he never failed. Also we had but to remember how more than once he had saved my own life, to feel almost content as to Trystie's safety. Still the everyday, unbelieving part of us could not stop the search.

I did not come home again till breakfast time. Curdie had arrived just before me, bringing in his mouth Trystie's little bead purse. It gave the mother a terrible shock, and suggested at first that this was all he could find of her. But I opened it. There lay, along with the child's lucky sixpence, a little packet made of minute blue humming-birds' feathers, sewn together with threads as fine as a spider's. We unfolded the packet—you may imagine how carefully!—and found it packed full of thistledown.

"*Only*-thistledown!" exclaimed the mother, and between tears and happiness she understood that it was Trystie's message.

She called Kit into the porch to see. Kit looked at it for one moment, exclaimed "I know!" and fetched his recorder.

At the moment his piping began, a puff of wind came down from the hills and set the thistledown flying—in quantities far greater than we could have stuffed into that

little packet of blue feathers. The wind carried every bit of it away over the Downs and out to the sea. But we still had the magic packet. We have it still, should any one like to see it.

Now I will set down Trystie's adventures as she told them to us afterwards.

She had the happiest voyage to the Island. Though the ship tossed up and down and rolled from side to side; though the wind whistled in the shrouds and the timbers creaked; though the spray blew over her and drenched her face; it was all so merry and jolly. She felt just like the red-beaked oyster-catcher who sat on the waves quite close to her ship and sang merrily about sad things. He wore a tight-fitting little green jacket. This was his song:

"My wings soar above
Old Earth's troubled love;
I laugh and she weeps at the dangerous sea:
Though rain torrents splash,
Though thunder clouds crash,
The storm is no more than a plaything to me!"

"It's a fairy bird," thought Trystie, "or he would not think so lightly of trouble and danger, I am sure. And it must be a fairy storm, or it would be awful. Yet it's only so jolly!"

She had become, I think, more of a typical child than we had ever seen her. She often would make us feel as if she belonged to some country far away. Older people sometimes have such a look in their eyes; but happy children only seldom.

How long the voyage lasted Trystie could not say. The island got nearer and nearer. The water became still and clear so that she could see down to the bottom of it. There

she beheld what looked like a ruined city, where the houses were all single shells arranged in mean streets and wide avenues. But the only inhabitants were crabs, who had dressed themselves up in human-like clothes of all kinds—some gaudy, some but rags—perhaps left behind by people who once had lived in the city. They looked really more absurd than naked crabs, because even the fine and sparkling clothes did not help them to walk straight like Christians! Trystie had ample time for observation, as her ship was now going very slowly. She felt sure it must be the place from which she had once run away to find her Fairy Godmother. She remembered also that it must be somewhere down there that the Iron Chest would be found where all the children's *Choose-keys* were locked up.

But now the ship entered a shady bay, where noble beech trees, growing down to the water's edge, rose high above the masts. The bay narrowed and the trees grew closer, and their boughs met over the sails, which still shimmered in rainbow colours, as they flapped in the still moonlit air. Then the airy sailors rigged in the jib-boom, swarmed up the shrouds, and close-reefed the square sails. Back they all sped to their oars; and the muffled rhythm of their rowing so mingled with their songs and the increasing night in the deep woods, through which the river was winding, that Trystie, tired with her own happiness, fell fast asleep.

When she awoke, the same feeling of happiness was with her. So strong was it that, while her eyes were still shut, she felt she must jump up and have a run on the Downs before she started the children on their tubbing and dressing. But when she did open her eyes, she knew all about it; knew, indeed, that she was in Fairyland and was come to

find her Godmother. Then a little pang of grief shot through her heart ; for she remembered that at home we should be anxious about her, and that her mother would have all the getting up to do, as well as managing the breakfast—not to mention the dairy, the strawberry jam that had to be made that day, and those awful holes in Robin's stockings ! All these things, however, she couldn't help now ; and her mind was greatly relieved when she remembered that Kirstie was expected home that very day. But she did long and long to be able to send a message to let us know she was quite safe and happy.

At last the ship rode at anchor by a grassy bank with yellow irises standing like sentinels by the river-side, and those wonderful ranunculuses called globe-flowers scattered over the little glade before her. Trystie jumped ashore. All around stood beech trees, the like of which she had never seen before. Their great swinging boughs reached out into the glade ; mysterious solitudes crept away and away into a deep wood where the great smooth trunks shot straight up to the leafy roof.

Then Trystie looked back at her ship. It was all falling to pieces—no, not pieces, but wings ! The masts and the decks and the oars were undoing themselves and mixing together into a cloud of thistledown fluttering and clinging together as if in agitation about what it was to do next. Then the rainbow-sails all came undone into little butterfly wings and the tiniest feathers, all madly flying about in intersecting circles and spirals and parabolas. Soon nothing was left of the ship but a great shining white cloud against the shadow of the trees, shot and spangled with soft jewelly colours. The cloud began to settle down on the grass ; and then Trystie found it was really made up of thistledown

"Mighty pleased will I be to do your bidding"

and tiny wings of butterflies and feathers of humming birds, with the colours of copper, silver, gold, blue steel, all changed into light softness. O, she wished she could just wrap up some of this fairy ship and send it home; then they would understand, she knew!

Most curiously, yet quite naturally, as the cloud fell down, there stepped from the middle of it the Leprecaun. He bowed down to the ground.

"Princess," he said, "it's meself will be the Captain of your fairy ship. Me crew remain on board till she is safe in dock, there to await your will and pleasure. Mighty pleased will I be, and every one of me men, to do your bidding."

So Trystie told him how much she wanted to send some of the thistledown home. She had kept her bead purse round her neck when she went to bed, that she might still treasure it in her sleep. She could now pack some of the thistledown into it, she said, as she had nothing else to hold it safely. Instantly there leaped out of the cloud two shining sailors. They quickly picked out hundreds of blue feathers, took from their pouches needles and spider-twine, sat down cross-legged, and stitched the feathers together to make a little square packet. This they stuffed with thistledown, tied it up with more of the twine, and gave it to the child. Then she unfastened from her neck the gay little purse, put the shimmering blue packet into it, alongside of the sixpence with the hole in it, and offered it to the Captain. But, instead of accepting it, he took off his shining belt, waved it round his head in three lightning flashes of silver light and whistled like a blackbird. Out of the wood came rushing to Trystie—who, but Curdie?

Nor would the brave dog undertake his mission till he

had had a great romp with the child. He rushed round and round her at full speed, in mighty approval of himself and Trystie and the grassy glade. Then he lay suddenly down at her feet, and she put her hand out to take his collar; but he was off again round and round, then away into the woods and out of sight; but, sure enough, back again just to lie down panting at her feet. After which, and some caressing from Trystie, he became sober; then at her bidding he sat up on his hind legs to get his instructions. He was just to carry the purse straight back to the farm and tell them all she was safe and happy, and would of course come back as soon as her Godmother sent her; and, please, her dear love to Kirstie, and would she see about Robin's stockings?

"In half a minute I will be there, Miss Trystie," said the precise Curdie, who always thought anything he was in a hurry to do would take only half a minute. He spoke as plainly, though a trifle barkily, as any dog need. "It's only two miles, you know. But I'll be back soon in my own shaggy ship with never a rudder to wag and steer with."

Then he disappeared among the trees, holding Trystie's little treasure in his teeth as tenderly as if he were a cat carrying her blind kitten.

That Curdie should come and go and speak like this was not at all surprising to Trystie, for she well knew—as indeed did I and the mother—that he was half fairy. But he had some painful adventures to go through with Kit before he would meet Trystie again; and it was she had to deliver them—not the other way about.

CHAPTER X

A glorious Night—Trystie and the Leprecaun—He explains certain Things—Trystie's Quest—The Fairy Queen's Garden.

THOUGH Trystie did not think she had been asleep at all, and though it was still night, she felt as fresh as a lark in the sunrise. She watched Curdie disappear among the trees in the direction of the river. A good big bit of her longed to go with him back to the farm; but quite as good and big a bit of her was joyfully happy at the thought of seeing her Fairy Godmother once more. Her dear and strange little Captain had disappeared; but she knew she had just to wait till she was called or fetched, and so lay down on her side to watch the irises and globe flowers. She used to tell Kit and the others that nobody ever really saw a flower till it was looked at from below as well as from above. Then she fell fast asleep again—and not much wonder after the long voyage!

When she opened her eyes, it was still night-time. Except the tiniest glints of it through the thick canopy of beech trees, the moon was hidden. There was light enough, however, for anything but sums and French irregular verbs and darning; and soon there were glowing, radiant colours all around her. The green leaves, the yellow flowers and the red tips of the daisies, were all plainer even than in daylight, because they shone—even the trunks of the trees—

with their own particular nature. Shepherds belonging to Downland often see fairy lights on dark starry nights, and believe they are the faint shinings of living things. In tropical countries too, certain fungi shine brilliantly in the dark. But here every living thing was alive in its light and proper colourings, so that the night was full of revelation and mystery. I feel sure that any one might have seen that Trystie also was shining with her own soul's quiet light.

Soon Trystie turned her head and saw Captain Leprecaun kneeling by one of those waxlike fungi, called orange elf-cups, and so much used by fairy folk. It was glowing with colour. His hood was thrown back and he was washing his face in the dew it held.

"Your pardon, Princess," he said, jumping up and drying his big face with his red hood; "it's me face I was claning for fear it will not be the soft wather I shall find next toime it's dhirty."

He was taken by surprise, and so spoke with a fuller brogue than he often used. He was particularly careful for the most part to speak correctly to a little English maiden like Trystie.

"It didn't look dirty when you came ashore," said Trystie, jumping to her feet and going up to him. "Does mine want washing, please?"

"Never at all," he answered positively, after looking up into her eyes for a full ten seconds; "never at all:—it couldn't, not if it was the chimney ye'd been sweeping."

They were now walking together through the woods and along a green path by the river-side, which was jewelled with sparks of moss-flowers.

"Washing his face in the dew"

"Captain," said Trystie, half in fun, "I'm afraid that's blarney."

"Princess," he answered, making his best bow, "when it's the innocent eyes of a real Princess, 'tis blarney's the living truth."

Then he proceeded to explain that most fairy people after a trip into Thickland need to wash their faces in the dew before their eyes are quite clear again; but she, he added, had never yet been altogether in Thickland and so would not need her face washed even if she *had* been sweeping chimneys.

"Doesn't soot count in Fairyland?" asked Trystie, not quite understanding, but merrily enough.

"Sooty is as sooty does," said the Captain. "D'ye think the fairy cobbler's hands will be dirty with his wax? Yet they've made ye a pair of fairy shoon fit for your honoured Godmother, good luck to her! By that same token, your Captain the Leprecaun's hands are just as clean as the new-fledged thistledown. So there's no need to wash the cobbler's hands of the wax at all at all; not in Fairyland."

For a moment Trystie could not think what he meant when he said he had made a pair of shoes for her. But she looked at her feet, and saw upon them the daintiest orange-red shoes, aglow as if light shone through them, and on the instep a shimmering surface looking like the dew in the elf-cup, though it did not spill. On one foot this shimmering was shaped like a heart, and on the other like a star. The shoes seemed to go with her nightgown finely; for she had no other clothes on, of course.

"Ye'll now perhaps remember what ye never knew before," said the Captain, "that every leprecaun is a

cobbler to the Fairies. By which, ye must understand that their business it is also to show lost people where treasures are hid; and so they take charge of the springs, and the brooks, and the waterfalls. Sorra a one of them can keep itself clean and tidy without its own leprecaun! Now, can ye believe that your Captain knows what's clean and what isn't, entirely?"

But Trystie was only half listening. She was entranced with her shoes.

"O, Captain Leprecaun," she exclaimed, "you're a *sweet* fairy man to make them for me. May I keep them always?"

"It's that same that they're yours for, Princess darling, though one may be in Fairyland and one beyond it. They will keep every stone from hurting your lily feet, and take charge of ye like an angel. It's not cobbler's wax, no, nor soot neither, will ever soil *their* brightness!"

Then they walked in silence, Trystie hardly able to keep her eyes off her shoes. Yet she was wondering about washing day in Fairyland and things of that sort. At last she looked at her friend and asked:

"But in Fairyland don't you wash soot off, if it *should* get on anything?"

"If the soot soots any one, the real pity it is to clean it off of him, Princess dear, because ye'll find him blacker than ever underneath it."

"I thought nothing was black in Fairyland," said Trystie, mystified.

"Ye're partly in the right too, Princess. Nothing ever will *look* black to ye but a few things *your* pretty eyes never could see."

Trystie was still more puzzled; but the Captain just

sang quietly, as if to himself and not wishing to intrude, this rhyme :

" Soot's as clane as summer rain
In the darkest night :
And the snow would match the crow
If it hid the light."

The deeper they went into the wood the brighter became the night. But no light now shone from above—only from the living things. Trystie discovered before her visit to Fairyland was over that the kindest things were the shiningest, and that if anything shone very deeply so as to make it beautiful through and through, it was sure to have some very important work on hand for the Queen. Some few flowers seemed to shine only in the skin of them. Then, though at first sight the light was soft and pretty, it was very easily put out if anything accidentally rubbed them up the wrong way ; then they looked quite sooty directly and were better left alone for a while. Indeed these flowers somehow had not yet got body and soul both together into Fairyland ; so not even the dew could wash all the thickness off.

Trystie thought she would have been content to go on walking for hours and had little need to ask questions of her companion. He was constantly looking up into her face to see if she was happy. His head came no higher than her waist. To Trystie it seemed as if they were going downhill all the way. This puzzled her, because they had certainly at no time gone uphill since landing on the island. So she asked the Captain if they were going much deeper, and how it was they had lost sight of the river.

" Then sure, I'll tell ye the truth," he answered, " we're *in* that same river, Princess. We're going deeper and

deeper into it so as *not* to keep our heads above water. In Thickland, whether Cahtholics or Prahdestans, they're all mighty afraid of drowning, and every one of them, silly idgiots ! tries to keep his head on top. But it's just the one part of him that's got to drown, to complete his christening, entirely. It's the fear of gettin' their souls saved that terrifies the life out of them. I'm told they confuse Fairyland with the bad place, and will sell their ignorant souls to a spalpeen of a Pigwidgeon to save their thick bodies."

"I didn't know that," answered Trystie; "and I live, most of me, in Thickland. It is sweeter than you think, Captain."

She must have been thinking of those she loved so dearly.

"I'm sure," she went on, speaking slowly, as if making certain that her words were quite accurate; "I am sure Tom Tit and Jenny Wren were christened *quite* completely, for they're the darlingest babies in the world."

"And happy am I to hear it!" exclaimed the gentle Captain, with real delight. "Maybe we'll fetch them here in me ship."

Then Trystie was naturally alarmed; for she knew what a terrible time they once had had at the farm when Honeypot had disappeared for three whole weeks. She felt glad that the fairy ship was all scattered in wings and thistledown; gladder still when she remembered that four mountain-ash trees now grew in the front garden of the farmhouse, so that only kind fairies could come into the nursery. But she only said:

"Your lovely ship is tumbled into pieces!"

"Never at all at all," he replied; "it's safe it will be in the Queen's moat, waiting her will and pleasure."

"But," said Trystie, "I saw it all fall down before you jumped out of the wreck of it."

"Never is anything wrecked in Fairyland," answered the little man, wagging his big head, "at least nothing that belongs to our blessed Queen. If the thought of the ship's in her heart, why, the ship is restin' on the waters that lap her castle walls. And when it's there, it's wherever she wants it to be."

Trystie could understand this, because she had been born in Fairyland—even though she had spent so much of her life in the dreadful Goblin Town, where the people had rebelled against the Queen and had declared themselves independent. They had so nearly succeeded that they thought they no longer believed in fairies, though actually they held them in greatest dread. They were afraid too of children, and imagined they had discovered a very superior way of bringing them up. In Fairyland, you must know, all the children are born with tiny pearl keys hanging round their necks to keep their little hearts safe. These are the *choose-keys*. The goblins thought that, if the keys were taken off, their owners would never need to choose between good and naughty, and so could be brought up to be good only. The consequences were so terrible to the children that Trystie, who, because her mother had kept her little baby's choose-key hidden from the Goblin magistrates, had managed to escape from Goblin Town, never forgot their sorry plight: she always hoped she would some day find the Iron Chest where the stolen keys were locked up, and give them back to the children. Trystie well remembered what horrible creatures these boys and girls—born quite sweet and ordinary babies—grew up to be.

This indeed was Trystie's Quest.

How far, or for how long Trystie and Captain Leprecaun travelled it is impossible to say: distance and time count for so little in Fairyland. But the wood grew steeper and steeper. Presently their path widened out into an avenue of beech trees, so regularly planted and so stately that their boles were like the columns of a cathedral whose groined roof was made of the branches and leaves. The floor over which they now must pass was like a great garden full of every flower that grows; and, wonder of wonders! they were all dancing in company with shepherd boys, dairymaids, ploughboys, and school-children, besides the woolliest sheep skipping on their hind legs or turning somersaults in their joy. Above were blackbirds, finches, kingfishers and tits, flying round and round in intersecting circles, all in green jackets—the Queen's livery—and singing as if their hearts would break for joy. Butterflies of all the rainbow colours, bumble bees, honey bees, fireflies and humming birds—all those gentle winged things who live on the kindness of the flowers—were gathered from every part of the world, and were scattering light and colour on the singing birds above and the dancers below. Trystie said this fairy dance and music made her feel as if it must be the great nave of Chichester, with the stained-glass windows all come alive for a whole holiday, and the mighty organ pipes changed into fairy recorders like Kit's.

"Princess, dear," said the Leprecaun—he had been watching her face very lovingly ever since they reached the avenue—"Princess, dear, this is one of your godmother's gardens. But you must not stay here. The Fairy Queen is waiting for ye in her audience chamber. So be pleased to close your eyes and take me hand and not open one of them till I bid ye."

The child did as she was told. She shut her eyes and held tightly the little hand so hard and firm with its work. For a short space of time all her outside world was dark and silent.

CHAPTER XI

The Squirrel winks at Davie—Kit starts again on a Journey, but forgets his Recorder.

BUT now we must go back to the farm.

The very day after Trystie's disappearance, Kirstie arrived; and greatly to my wife's delight, as her hands were overfull. She would never admit that any work was too much, because, she said, if she were a cowman's wife she would get no help, and would have to cook and do the washing as well as having the children always down with chicken-pox or something! But then, as I told her, she would not have half the neighbours' troubles to bear and the whole country-side to advise and encourage. Kirstie too was glad to be home again: the farm was, after living so many years in it, almost more her home than Brawloch, her native village in Ross-shire. Since her last visit to her old mother, the railway had come, and, she greatly feared, "the screechin' wustles had frighted away the last of the fairies." "I'm wae to think," she said, as she told the children the dread news, "old Scotland will soon be God-fearin' no more, and must hang her head before the nations!" When we told her all our fairy news, she was not surprised, just saying that the Downs were not a bad place for exiles. But even she was puzzled to account for Kit's Pigwidgeons. Jonas had never told her about his old recorder, so that she was altogether sceptical at Kit's recital of its virtues. But when after school he fetched it and played upon it,

she threw her loving arms about the child. "O, my bairn, my bairn!" she said, holding him at arms' length and looking into his eyes through her tears; "and can his old nurse do nothing at all to keep him at home? Must he go because the laverocks (the larks) call to him? Poor laddie! An' he wasn't frightened at all? My wee brave laddie!" Then she hugged him again, in spite of some boyish wriggling.

But now the truth must be told about our boy Kit. It is not much to his discredit, I think, and he now prefers that I should put it all down. It was just this, that every day the poor child was getting more boastful about his prowess when the Pigwidgeons tried to frighten him. Both his mother and I did our best to sober him, and I took him seriously to task on the subject. I told him it was nothing to his praise that he was not frightened, because he was made that way; while Davie, naturally timider, would not be at all to blame if he was afraid, because that was *his* make. Kit was for a whole minute really troubled, and said:

"I think they'd better shockle me, Father; don't *you?* But they can't! I know they can't!"

So arguments were not much use, and we had to trust that the boastfulness would wear off if we took no notice of it. Anyhow, he was keen to be off again at the first opportunity. He would often go up to the gable end, but only to come back disappointed: the skylight was so small that it was quite ridiculous to think of going through it! His failures seemed in a measure to check his tendency to brag, poor child! We loved that boy so deeply that we came almost to dread his chatter about the Pigwidgeons and the impossibility of their frightening him.

It was now holiday-time and the children were freer for

their own pursuits. Of these they had plenty; and so full of interest was the country to them, with multitudes of friends among the dogs and birds and small four-footed things, that they had little need of supervision. I had for some time intended that summer teaching Kit to ride. Accordingly, the day after Kirstie's return, partly to give us all something to think about besides Trystie's disappearance, I gave him his first mount—bareback, of course: if he got a fall or two, it would perhaps do his pride good! But old Goodboy, to whom the responsibility was entrusted, was almost too careful of the child he loved so well; and Kit was, I am afraid, still more set up than ever. Indeed, there seemed to be nothing the child tried to do but it was done at once—too easily, we thought, for the good of his little heart. I tried Davie with a mount also; but he was really too small for the big horse; it made him pale and nervous, though full of excitement at the wonderful event. He was, however, plunged into grief when he was told he must get a bit bigger—or Goodboy must get a bit smaller—before he could learn to ride. He asked if he couldn't learn on Neddy. But Neddy was a rather vicious old donkey, useful enough in the little cart, but so uncertain in temper that he would let no one but myself or Charley or Kit go near him.

"No," said his mother, falling in with Davie's anxiety to follow Kit's example; "I can't think who there is about the farm to carry my Davie on his back. Curdie hasn't a tail to hang on by, though a real fairy dog like him could grow big enough, of course, if he chose. O, Davie, what a pity!"

"What's a pity, Mother?" asked the child, instantly curious, and drying his tears in his smock.

" Why, if only your squirrel had stayed with us, he might have done—just to learn to ride upon. And such a tail as he had ! Why, no one on *his* back could ever fall off."

Davie's eyes opened very wide and he clasped his hands high above his head as if clinging on to the squirrel's tail. The bare suggestion was enough—however funny : he was such an imaginative child ! But he merely said, " O ! Mother, if only—— ! "

Trystie had been gone for two whole days now. In spite of her message—which there could be no mistaking—we could not feel easy. Thistledown, and packets made of humming-bird feathers, and Curdie's mysterious bringing of them, were all very well at the full moon or in the twilight ; but in the middle of the day, surrounded by all the commonplace farm-and-house duties and worries, it was not possible to be happy about our girl. Here, however, Kirstie came to our help. She reminded us how right she had been two years before, when the baby—Honeypot, it was then—had been stolen, and I had been gone three weeks finding her ; when she, the nurse, had known all along it was the fairies ; and when Trystie came back with us out of Fairyland. These facts we could not question ; and so Kirstie with her Celtic faith helped us to be patient and not unbelieving. She had a strong conviction that Kit's adventures had some connection with Trystie's journey—though what it was she could not say. She had some gift of the Celtic second sight—by which many Highland people are able to see the things that people whom they love are doing in distant places. She had begged the mother to put the children to bed one evening and to be left alone in Trystie's attic. After two hours she came down to us at supper, confessing that she had seen hardly any-

"Jonas got in a wax"

thing to help us. But she had just one glint of Trystie walking through a deep shining wood, at the bottom of a great river. The child, she said, looked shining and quite happy, and was chatting merrily with a wee big-headed mannikin in a green jacket and a red cap and little hard hands. But more than this she could not discern. Kirstie seemed quite tired out, and was not very willing to talk.

That same afternoon, Kit came running home post haste, after a recorder lesson with Jonas, to tell Davie he had seen the squirrel again, looking ruefully up into the cherry tree because the fruit was all gathered and only six shrivelled cherries left for him and the birds. They had been sitting on stools set on " the bricks," as they call the bricked path of a cottage garden, Jonas with his back to the cherry tree.

" So," said Kit, " he wasn't afraid ; and he looked up into the tree with one eye, and at me with the other. And, Davie, he winked at me, as plain as a twinkle star, so that I laughed, and made the recorder squeak. And Jonas got in a wax, and snatched it from me. But I jumped up and ran and said, ' Good night, Sir Squirrel ' ; and I came as fast as—as fast as winking, to tell you, Davie. O, I wish he'd come here, I do ! "

At the farm we have a curious custom at which our neighbours laugh, I am told, and for which, with a few other things, they think us all half crazy. Neighbours the world over have a way of thinking anybody is mad who does anything differently from the usual way of it—however foolish the usual way may be. This custom of ours is never to lock up anything—not even the front and back doors at night. The advantage is great to all thieves, because

they are not tempted to break in ; and to ourselves, because we are not afraid of them. Now and again a tramp will get into the larder and help himself—a thing he wouldn't do unless hungry, poor fellow ! Nothing important is ever stolen. But then we have nothing left worth stealing, for my wife and I stole each the other's heart years and years ago, and beyond all recovery ! There are the children, of course ; but only the fairies would want them, and such thieves get through bolted doors more easily than when they are closed on the latch. We have no silver things, even the spoons being of horn or pewter or beechwood. There is not a grain of gold in all the house except a band round one of the mother's fingers—and that I made for her myself. So all our doors are unlocked ; and the wise mother thinks it may be one of the reasons why our neighbours trust us so kindly and value our advice so highly—even though we are half crazy !

I don't even think it would have made any difference to what happened later to Davie if all doors and windows had been bolted or even screwed up ; you can't stop up every chimney and mouse-hole—not in so old a house as ours.

But before telling about Davie, it is necessary to relate Kit's next adventure.

I do not know what o'clock it was that, the night following our talk in the meadow about Davie learning to ride, Kit dressed himself, crept down the stair and opened the house door so softly that no one heard him. The waning moon was not yet up, though the stars were bright enough for a country child to feel quite at home in the night. Curdie had crept out so quietly after him that Kit neither saw nor heard the artful dog till they found one another in the barn ;

and then each of them was very glad to have the best companion in the world. Though it was pitch dark under the great roof, the boy made straight for the ladder and climbed it. Curdie scrambled after. Any dog with practice can get up a ladder, and Curdie, with his bear-like hind-feet, finds it quite easy.

Then Kit—he never knew what it was that made him go into the barn that night—remembered that Jonas had taken away his recorder, and that he ought to have it with him now.

Up till this minute he had not thought of it again, because he had no fear that Jonas would not give it him back directly he asked for it. His only regret in the matter was that he had been rather rude to the dear, chummy, crinkle-neck old man—he never wanted to call him a beast now! But he did wish he had brought the recorder. True, he had his own little pipe in his smock-pocket. But of late he had lost all liking for it. What boy would care to hear a pig trying to squeak sweetly when he might listen to a blackbird piping? Yet a pink, naked, four-footed thing, with flapping ears and a twist of a stiff curl for tail, might be good company if all the birds had flown away to Egypt or other outlandish place. So he was glad he had his little pipe. Up on the platform hardly a shadow of colour could be seen through the glass. Kit sat down by the dog's side and put his arm round his neck; almost with nose to nose, the two companions looked up into the darkness.

One star shone through the ash-leaves and through the glass. But, as Kit said afterwards, "it was a regular puzzle-star. It didn't know it ought to twinkle in one place and stop there. It jumped about so, first peeping in at a blue

pane, then at a red, and then at a green." Curdie turned his head to Kit and said, as clear as bells :

"Queer but nice!"

The words were like Ali Baba's "Open Sesame"; for immediately the star stood stock-still and twinkled so determinedly that the two could see each other quite distinctly. Bright-coloured things, as light as sea-froth scampering over the sunny Downs after a storm at sea, fluttered down from the skylight and settled all round the two watchers. Each one that came brought more light, making the others easier to see. So that very soon the two friends realized that the fairy people were come to them. Kit hoped none of the Pigwidgeons would find him ; for he heartily disliked and despised them—all except, perhaps, Crickety, for whom, as he had made him so ugly and his eyes so crooked, he felt a little responsible, Though the little visitors, because of their foam-like clothes faintly shimmering like mother-of-pearl, were by no means easy to see, Kit knew there were no Pigwidgeons among them—not even when they began to sing what at first seemed to be the shocking song the Pigwidgeons had tried to frighten him with. But soon Kit knew this song was the right one. It was as pretty and sweet as fairies themselves, and Kit at once understood that the other he had heard the Pigwidgeons sing was all a scoffing at this one. He was astonished to find how like a very pretty thing a very ugly one may be, and yet altogether different. But afterwards he was not sure that he remembered the words of this night's song quite rightly, because they had such a foamy shape, as he said. He sang them several times to Honeypot and the twins ; each time they came better.

This was the song their music made :

" At dawn the larks sing, and rise on the wing
To greet rosy clouds and the sun :
At eve the bells ring with pipes, ting-a-ling,
When shepherds and sheep have their fun.
O, dancing with singing birds all in a row,
Dancing and singing wherever we go !

" Love sleeps in the seed, makes gay the poor weed
With flowers for fairies to find ;
With Love taking heed, our treasure and need
Alike are with roses entwined.
O, springtime and summer, they come and they go,
Springtime and summer above and below !

" With blankets of snow, when bitter winds blow,
Love tucks up her babies in bed ;
The sun all aglow leaps up at cock's crow,
To tip the white daisies with red.
O, brave cock-a-doodle ! The milch cows a-low !
The harness a-jingle ! The ploughboy's gee-wo !

" She lives all alone, with a heart like a stone,
The snake who would frolics forbid :
Curled up on her throne, her fang is unknown
To the lamb and the light-leaping kid !
O, kiddies and lambkins their happiness show
In leaping and laughing with ewe-sheep and doe !

" Love's sweet, love is best ; one lark in the nest
Sits warming her eggs, four or five :
Her mate has his quest, the sun in the west,
To tell him the chicks are alive.
O, kisses and cuddles ! The little shells crack !
Kisses and cuddles we never shall lack ! "

CHAPTER XII

Pigwidgeon Law — Galleybird's Hole — A Jumbled Yell-song — King Parsnip's tragic Descent from the Throne and melancholy End.

AS these foam-like fairies sang, they gathered close together beneath the skylight where the star shone brightest. Still singing, they piled themselves up in a heap. It was not at all easy for Kit to see how they did what followed, because the light was so dim and his attention was all given to the pretty song. Certainly the little people, all now glowing with a rosy, transparent light that made them quite individual, climbed up one on top of the other till they reached the window in the roof, now open once more. Soon their separate distinctness faded away: perhaps themselves were gone. But they left the work of their hands behind them in the form of a pearly ladder, standing in a dim rosy light.

"How kind you are, good fairies!" said Kit; "aren't they, Curdie? But I think, I *almost* think, I ought to go back to bed. Come along, Curdie, we will!"

But in Fairyland there is no going back. They trudged along: but it was upon the green road with the bouncy ways that did not go home. Curdie went a little ahead, and saved his young master much of the difficulty he had found on his former expedition.

Curdie began to sniff and poke his nose along the ground

for some distance before they reached the thicket where Crickety had pounced upon Kit. Soon Kit knew why he sniffed : it was that everlasting peppermint again ! " Won't he *ever* get through it ? " Kit asked himself as they reached the thicket and saw Crickety sitting disconsolate and working his jaw about.

Crickety did not pounce this time. He looked tired and began to talk as if they had never parted.

" Not if I suck it till doomsday," the ugly thing wearily mumbled, in answer to Kit's thought. He was certainly much thinner, so that his buttons and stripes hung down quite loosely. " The teeth do get so mixed up with it that I'm sick of the whole guzzly business ! "

" Throw it away then," said Kit.

" What ! and let King Parsnip get it ? Never ! " replied the Pigwidgeon. " Says he *must* have a bull's-eye or a boy's-eye. O, he's a guzzly parson, he is ! He's the King too, and he'd stick to my peppermint as sure as he's stuck on the throne ! "

" But what does he want my eyes for ? You never told me when I asked you before," said Kit, standing with his hands behind him, while Curdie sat down and barked in jerks, though very softly.

" Because it's the law, of course," replied Crickety, with a sigh.

" Then it's a wicked law, and I don't believe it," exclaimed Kit, instantly serious. Curdie now whispered a low growl.

The Pigwidgeon paid no attention to the interruption, but continued :

" There's lots of laws here ; but nobody keeps any he don't like."

"That can't be right either!" said Kit.

"Why not?" was the rejoinder. "If you get a bite of a sour apple, do you swallow it and get the pinafore ache? Not likely! you spit it out, and give the rest to your little sister, *you* do. So do us Pigwidgeons do. We *administer* the laws we don't like: we don't *keep* them. So when a boy once sets eyes on us Pigwidgeons his eyes *must* be googled. But there's another law—though it's a silly fairy one: eyes can't be googled till the boy's shockled."

"Then I'm all right," said Kit boastfully, I am afraid; "you've tried to shockle me, and you only made me sniggle. Let's see some more shockle-tricks!"

"Ah, you'll ask to see fewer soon," replied Crickety warningly.

The creature began to stand up, but so slowly, Kit says, that he didn't *seem* to do it all at once. His legs looked as if they got up first; then his body, carrying his heavy head; and last of all his smile carrying the peppermint.

"King's palace wobbles with horrible things!" he continued, stretching his arms and gaping with some risk of losing his treasure. "Why, you'll hardly believe it, but the yells from the dungeons—ah! yells made a-purpose for boys, *they* are, and shocklier than pig's squealing—much more natural-like, too!"

"Then I won't go there," protested Kit, though he felt that artificial yellings, if ever so loud, would not be as terrifying as the pitiful squeals he once had to listen to when he liberated a little fox-cub and some bunnies from Jonas's snares.

"But you've got to," replied the Pigwidgeon; "here nobody's allowed to choose."

"Except you, I suppose," said Curdie, chuckling; "and you only chews peppermint!"

"What's the matter with *you*," asked Crickety, turning insolently to the dog. "What do *you* want?"

But Curdie was too sweet-tempered to be ruffled. He only murmured:

> "Dog wants but little wag behind,
> Nor wants that little long!"

But the boy, always willing to be kind and polite, said quite cheerily:

"Right you are! I don't mind coming—much."

"Then," continued Crickety, in a slobbery sort of whisper, "worst of all there's the Creaky Cart. Why, if *I* saw that, I'd be done for."

At this moment the grotesque creature looked terribly afraid. He stopped chewing and turned a somersault, so that, for a moment, Kit couldn't see which end of him he was sitting on. Then, recovering himself with a jerk, Crickety looked over his shoulder as if he heard something fearful coming up behind him. He hissed hoarsely: "Did you hear a creak?"

But Kit had heard only the rustle of leaves and a nightingale singing and a sweet sound like water running through rushes and over shining pebbles.

As soon as Crickety was nearly himself again, he got on to his feet stiffly, and declared they must be getting on, because all the others were waiting. So the three trudged along, Curdie coming up behind and looking rather miserable, as if he came only because his little master might need him.

The road rapidly widened and became rougher, some of

the furrows being so deep that Kit had to jump across. There was one that Crickety, being much smaller and now really tired, could not jump. Yet he managed splendidly. He opened his smile as wide as he dared ; then, as if there were a hinge at the back of it, doubled his head's top-half so far back that he was able to catch his top teeth in his heels. But he was so stiff, with only the rusty spring of the rat-trap for a backbone, that it was all he could do to reach his heels. Nevertheless, when he suddenly let go, the recoil shot him across the chasm and landed him panting on the other side. There he sat for two minutes holding his hands to his mouth, as if in an agony of toothache. Then he threw away about half a dozen teeth and seemed a bit better. Even Curdie was sorry for him.

" Cheer up, sir," he said ; " there's as good teeth in the gums as ever come out of them ! "

They were now arrived at the trunk of the tree. A little to the right of the place where the branch, along which they had been walking, joined the trunk, was a great raised circle looking like the crater of a volcano, though of course on the side of the trunk. Here at one time or another a bough had been lopped off, the wood had become rotten, and a woodpecker, or galleybird, as we call it in Sussex, had dug out its burrow.[1] Into the dark cavern the Pig-widgeon climbed. Kit was for following, but drew back—not because of what he saw, but because the malodorous air made him almost afraid. Country boys all know how evilly a woodpecker's nest stinks—almost as bad as a king-fisher's ; but this hole was even worse. So horridly musty

[1] The green woodpecker never attacks sound timber, as is often supposed, but only dead wood softened by rain and wind or partly destroyed by fungi. In this way the bird is more likely to do the tree good than to help in its dying, for which it is often unjustly blamed.

indeed was it, that, had not Crickety looked back and exclaimed, "Shockled, by snouts!" Kit feels sure he would have turned and run from it and the peppermint odour together. As it was, he followed his leader. Curdie, though his black nose went sniffing and twitching about, did not seem to dislike it; and Kit then felt that what Curdie did not mind, he himself ought to bear. In this conclusion, I think, he showed better pluck than reasoning!

There was a very steep ladder inside the hole. Down and down the three went, Curdie managing this ladder quite easily. The deeper they got, the better could they see; so that, by the time they reached the vast chamber at the bottom, the light was enough to see by, though it was some minutes before Kit could discriminate things clearly. The light came from every bit of the round wall and domed roof. It was touch-wood everywhere, which always glows in the dark with the faint bluey light of decay. But besides this there were hanging from the roof innumerable lanterns, which, a little later when Kit had opportunity for closer inspection, proved to be glow-worms. As each one became exhausted and its light paled, a great hairy spider, carrying a fresh and wriggling worm in its jaws, fastened it to the roof with a thread of its own spinning. The burnt-out glow-worms, Kit found out afterwards, were the spiders' perquisites.

As soon as Kit could see clearly, he realized that he and Curdie were standing in the middle of a crescent row of Pigwidgeons. Crickety had joined them. There were six on each side of a raised throne, which was covered by a stoat's skin, spread over a crimson cushion. The wicked head, with nose pointing forwards, formed the seat; the two fore-feet turned up on each side made the arms; the skin

covered also the back of the throne, and the two hind-feet turned forwards and fitted closely to each of the occupant's shoulders; the tail was arranged as a sort of flag-canopy, which never ceased waving to and fro, up and down, in rhythmic alternation. Who should be sitting in the throne but Parson Parsnip. He was doing his best to look comfortable and dignified. For this feat he seemed to think it essential that he should constantly set straight his rebellious, dingy-white choker. But all his gesticulations and movements somehow suggested that he was fixed to the throne like a Guy Fawkes with a broom-stick up its back. He wore a crown, which presently Kit saw was an upside-down goldfinch's nest—the softest lined and neatest of all nests.[1] It had set round the top seven balls made of the same bird's eggs, pale blue with red-brown specks, each with a long pin through it, which also fixed on the summit a glowworm's shining tail.

Above the throne was written in letters of touch-wood, "KING PARSNIP THE LAST."

The King now produced from underneath the cushion something which in ordinary life would have been a penny tin trumpet. He blew a squeaky blast and then proceeded to address the people. Wherever he thought applause was due, he sounded a *tootle-too-too*, took a deep breath, and then continued his speech, though sometimes the pathos of his words would compel him to utter a suppressed dry sob.

"My beloved subjects," he began; but——

"Hideous objects, *I* call them!" interrupted the disrespectful Curdie, and got a little cuff from Kit for his pains.

[1] One of these pretty nests with its brown-spotted eggs had been cruelly robbed from a big apple tree in our orchard only two days before.

"My beloved subjects," continued the King, "the time is at hand for things to happen! Why? Because I see a loathsome object standing before me——"

He stretched out one thin naked leg, pointed its root-like big toe at Kit, curled up all the five little toes, as if ashamed of his ill-assorted foot, and continued:

"A horrible boy with guzzly eyes! a shocking, ugly boy, not ashamed to be called Kit! a boy who will bring my white tie in sorrow to the grave! a boy who *will* not be shockled! (*Tootle-too-too!*) A bold, bad boy who boggled the rights of Nature and made—O, I blush to tell it!—a parson with bare legs and two too many total toes. (*Tootle-too-too!*) Too unshockled are his eyes to google them out, as is our guzzly custom with such juvenile malefactors, and he must suffer the capital penalty of being stuck upon this throne!"

"That will be capital fun," said Kit, turning to his companion. "You shall be prime minister, Curdie, and worry them all!"

"But for my white choker's support," continued the King, suddenly drawing up both legs as if afraid of Curdie's teeth, "I—even I, your King!—could never lift up my head again. Yet with my choker's condescending, solemn, and reverend starchiness, it is possible to adorn a throne even without the nether garments necessary to common kings. (*Tootle-too-too!*) When my white choker is limp and crumply, at times I can even unbend, and, in spite of insult and threat of teeth, be jovial."

But here his remarks became quite inaudible because the Pigwidgeons started singing in the most insulting manner. The King tried harder and harder to give point to his interesting remarks by blowing the *tootle-too-too* on

his trumpet. But he succeeded only in stimulating his people to further contempt. Kit says all their shouting was like jumbled up, unkind yell-songs. When he tries to give us the words, they come like this, though they were really, he says, "much jumblier:"

"Let's drill him,
And mill him;
Let's thrill him,
And spill him;
Then chill him,
And kill him;
(And by and by fill him!)
For the Reverend old Croker's
White choker's
A bad thing,
A mad thing,
A sad thing:
It's enough when awry
To make a Pig sigh!

"His choker's askew!
And in two crooked rows
Too many by two
Is his total of toes!

"We'll slang him,
And wrangle him,
We'll bang him,
And strangle him,
Then hang him,
And dangle him.
When sufficient we've swang him,
We'll howl and harangue him!
The church bells shall clang,
Shall wrangle
Shall jangle;
The while we untangle,
And finely flat mangle,
And starch and new-fangle,
As prim as a pie,
His white choker tie!

" Though his tie's good as new,
Still, his legs have no hose ;
And too many by two
Is his total of toes !

" Let's stroke, and
Invoke him,
Then poke, and
Provoke him,
And staley-old-joke him !
There's plenty to choke him—
Raw sawdust
Chopped straw-dust,
Old-law dust,
Apple-core dust,
Old-score dust,
Flue-floor dust,
Cock-sure dust,
Hen-claw dust,
Chaff-chaw dust,
Kick-shaw dust,
Big swore dust ;
And more and still more dust !
Full fill him we must
Till he stretches his crust,
And falls biting the dust ;—
O ! the pore feller's bust !

" Legs, beat black and blue,
Look neat without hose :
Can't we trim off just two
Of his total of toes ? "

But the King, in his efforts to believe that the rude words were kindly meant, nearly burst himself with his tin-trumpet blasting. He fell from the throne with such a wriggle that his white tie caught in one of the stoat's hind feet and proved a very literal *choker.* They cut him down—and set him up again. They *tootle-too'd* the tin trumpet into his snail-shell ears. But it was too late ; and he fell upon his face, dead.

"It was too late"

Then it was that Kit saw sticking up in the middle of the throne's soft and gold-fringed crimson cushion a long iron skewer, upon which the King had been stuck. The white choker fluttered down, and, as it fell, tickled Curdie's nose.

"Tie untied tarries for no man!" said the wise dog, twitching his nostrils. Then he hung his tongue out to dry.

CHAPTER XIII

Kit is put on the Throne—Curdie acts as Policeman and is made Prime Minister.

IMMEDIATELY the twelve creatures crowded round Kit. Curdie whispered softly to him :

" Nothing to fear, Master Kit ! I'll manage that skewer. Had a set-to with the same sort of thing once in the larder at home. Faint heart never won ! "

They carried Kit unresisting to the throne and put him on it. But Curdie was quicker ; he rushed underneath and quickly tugged down the skewer, placed it on the ground beneath the throne, and sat upon it. Then the stoat's tail ceased to lash about and the feet became limp. Kit was soon comfortably seated. Curdie's shaggy head looked out between the boy-King's dangling legs and seemed as innocent as he always does after bringing home a lost sheep.

Surely, if anything could have done it, that skewer would have frightened Kit, had not the careful Curdie anticipated the danger ! O, he was a wise and gentle-hearted dog ! But Kit was not a bit afraid, and only felt that he must play up to his part. He had once acted the King in a fairy play called *Snowdrop,* and he knew he must look grand and proud. Fortunately also he had just read *Ivanhoe,* and had gathered from it some idea of the right sort of words to use. In a very few moments too he found he

must exercise his authority; for the twelve Pigwidgeons were now trampling and kicking and abusing the rooty remains of the ex-King for all they were worth—which was not very much, after all!

"My lord Curdie," exclaimed Kit, stretching out his hand, and, with his little pipe as a sceptre, pointing to the distance, "I prithee fold these caitiff lords in yonder dungeon!"

Curdie immediately was all round them at once, barking and jumping at them as if they were sheep. As warning to the others he took a snap-bite out of Crickety. Then they broke away. As soon as they were all huddled together in the distant cave, to which Kit had pointed, back raced the dog and laid on his master's knee the bit he had taken out of Crickety's thickest part.

"Not worth eating," the dog said. "Thought it might be bacon-widgeon, your Majesty; but it tastes like turnip! Think it's wiser not to swallow it! A bit in the teeth is worth two in the paunch!"

So Kit undid his royal austerity and laughed till he couldn't hold himself.

Then he saw lying at a little distance from the throne the mortal and disjointed remains of the parson. "Requiescat in pieces!" muttered Curdie to himself. The dog must have been in one of his most waggish moods. He was always at his best when difficulty and danger were greatest. "The drier the bone," he would say, "the sweeter the joke!"

Kings before this Parsnip have been known to lose their heads; but this one had lost himself as well, not to mention legs, toes, and every trace of respectability, except the white choker. The only one of all those Pigwidgeons who

"A snap-bite out of Crickety"

looked at all concerned was she whom Kit presently named the Lady of the Wardrobe. She went to help the victim ; but he was too far scattered. She picked the tie up reverently, held it to the place where her heart ought to be, cast her eyes up to the dome, and looked as though she would shed a tear, had she any such thing about her. Kit felt that the correct thing would be for him to do likewise ; but he never knew how the trick was done, though he had sometimes cried enough to wash his face !

Kit, whatever he felt, could at least be stern. So he clothed himself again in his garment of regal austerity.

" We are your King," he shouted, " and will, in our own good time, bring to justice the perpetrators of this most horrid and regicidal crime—the bashing of your King and our whilom friend, Parsnip the Last—albeit he was little more than a crooked root and a piece of tape. Justice and mercy shall ever be our royal will and desire. Right Honourable Curdie, thou hast exceeded our royal prerogatives. Return this chunk of mangold to that nether limb from which thou didst most feelingly bite it out. Acquaint Mr. Honourable Crickety with our royal clemency ; and bring hither the varlet to receive on bended knee our free pardon for thy zeal."

" Knees bend the wrong way for kneeling, Master Kit," said Curdie as he ran to obey the command.

When Crickety came, looking the picture of misery, and holding in its place the restored portion of his anatomy, the King thought he had better make him Home Secretary, and send him home to bed. He summoned one after another. The softest and wobbliest he made Secretary for War, and told him to go and put down war, " because," he said, " my mother says it's cruel, and my father says it does more harm

than good, nearly always." The one who wore a coat made from a piece of Honeypot's blue frock, he named First Lord of the Admiralty, and told him not to admire himself so much. The one in the mole-skin—whom, from his first making of her, he had thought rather pretty, though sentimental and vain—he made Lady of the Wardrobe, and said she must keep the late King's white choker shut up in it because it looked so mournful. Another, with the long tie made of Wicksy's hair, was Knight of the Horse's Garter; and so on, till he had found an office for every one of the creatures he had himself made. They were now all as meek as sheep, though not nearly so innocent-looking.

There were crowds of other Pigwidgeons, more monkey-like than those of his own making. They were constantly bowing and cringing to him and Curdie, hardly knowing which was King and which Curdie. Snouty footmen brought them nice things to eat—chiefly nuts and little eggs and cherries and apples. They had holly-leaves painted blue and white for plates, because they were hard and stiff; but so also were their prickles, and the silly footmen never learned how to avoid being pricked by them, and then squealing and dropping the dishes. But there was nothing to drink; and, when Kit remembered that he had seen no water at all in Pigwidgeon-land, it made him feel awfully thirsty. Curdie, for the most part, kept his tongue hanging out.

Both of them soon had enough of the glory; but the crowd of courtiers was so great that, for the present, Kit saw it was impossible to get away. They all, of course, thought he was spiked on to the throne and not made to come off and on any more. They were too stupid to see that the skewer now lying under the throne was the same one that had supported the late King in his trials; whom,

like some other historic kings, it had proved impossible to keep in his place.

Presently night-time seemed to come, and Kit was glad because he was getting very sleepy. Many huge spiders—some bigger than Curdie—crawled up to the roof by a spiral path, which went round and round in lessening circles and was intersected by radiating lines from the centre of the dome, so that, in the fading light, the roof looked exactly like a vast spider's web. The long-and-creepy-legged monsters then proceeded to carry the lanterns away, which now wriggled again, though feebly. When the last lantern was carried out, the bluish phosphorescence of the walls and roof became fainter till there was hardly light enough to get about. The spiders had come into the great room by innumerable doors. Kit saw, as they opened, that some led into long passages down which were marching processions of spiders, each carrying its lantern-worm on one uplifted leg. Other doors opened into small rooms, in some of which there were Pigwidgeons feeding or sleeping in heaps; and, in yet others, spiders were supping upon their perquisites. But there were two openings which Kit never lost sight of. One had a door of shimmering pearly lustre, between which and themselves all the Pigwidgeons left as wide a distance as possible, when they had to pass it. The other was the great hole half-way up the dome-roof by which he and Curdie and Crickety had entered. He often looked up at it and at the ladder down which they had climbed. Indeed now that the whole place was almost dark and the Pigwidgeons all asleep, Kit could still see the hole, because it was darker than the luridly luminous walls, and one bright star shone straight down into his heart, making him long to get home to his mother.

As soon as Kit was sure all were sleeping, he whispered to his Prime Minister :

" Curdie, old doggie, aren't you awfully thirsty ? "

" Yes, I am, Master Kit ; I could do with a sip, 'twixt my tongue and my lip."

" Don't you think we'd better make a bolt for the door ? " asked Kit.

" Bolt for what ? " asked Curdie waggishly and stretching himself ; " I'd rather bolt some dinner than make one for the door ! "

" Curdie," said Kit, feeling too thirsty for joking, " don't be a silly donkey ! "

But Curdie sat down again and began scratching his left ear, quite innocently, as he muttered to himself, " Every dog has his bray ! " and chuckled.

They walked away on tiptoe, especially Curdie, till they were right under the black hole. They felt about for the ladder, but could not find it. Round and about they groped with hands and nose, Kit holding Curdie fast by the collar, so that they should not lose one another. They spent an hour looking for that ladder. They might as well have searched all night. The ladder was gone !

CHAPTER XIV

The Character of Squirrels—Davie learns to ride—He reaches Galley-bird's Hole with the Recorder

BEFORE I can tell more of the story it is necessary that every one should know certain things about squirrels: otherwise subsequent events will be hardly credible. From what Davie, Kit, and Trystie tell me about their good friends, Sir Squirrel and his Dame, it is quite clear that whatever part of the world squirrels belong to, and whatever their fashion of coat and tail—whether they are sturdy English red squirrels, or grey Siberians, or flying squirrels from India, or American chipmucks—they really must be, every one of them, of Irish ancestry. Squirrels are the staunchest of friends and will take the most terrific leaps—from tree to tree, as well as from metaphor to metaphor—all out of kindness and trustiness. Then they are the most faithful parents and home-lovers. No gad-abouts they—for all their fine leapings! They never change their wives or their husbands all through their lives, as so many people do who live in trees. The little ones, quite as sensibly, never change their fathers and mothers—not even when they grow up and become fresh fathers and mothers once a year to a fresh litter of babies. Then again, it must be because they have Irish blood in them—though our own red ones are not the less English to the very tail of them—that, while they store up great quantities of horse-chestnuts

and beech-nuts and filberts for the winter, they hide away their larders so cleverly that, when winter comes, they themselves often cannot find them! You may see the little red creatures darting about, tails following fast behind, on the snow from one big root to another, searching for the plentiful hoard; and, if you have sharp eyes like our boys', you may then see, nearly as carefully hidden and high up in the fork of some beech tree, a domed nest, or dray, as it is called, with a little round doorway below; and out of the doorway you may see Mrs. Squirrel or one of her children, now about six months old—nearly grown up indeed—peeping and watching very anxiously the husband and father as he hunts for the family larder.

Then another point accounted for by their being so Irish is that they are always ready for gymnastics, dances, and games—even if to-morrow is rent-day and they've lost every one of their larders. Mr. Squirrel too always chooses to dance with his own lady rather than with any one else. Last, and perhaps the most important of all, is that they know more about fairies than any other people. In olden days, indeed, the Norse people believed the squirrels were the messengers from unseen and powerful spirits who helped mortals in their difficulties and troubles. So our squirrels' intimacy with the fairy-folk is quite as ordinary a thing as an Irish Leprecaun's.

Having explained this much, nothing that follows will bevery surprising.

Upon a certain evening Davie's own squirrel sat by his wife. He was now *Sir* Squirrel since a certain visit to the Fairy Queen. It was after supper, and the four children were curled up in each other's arms pretending to be asleep.

"Dame, dear," he said, "the Queen has given that Davie to me to look after. But for him, you know, you'd have had to go into mourning like a stoat in the winter, and bring up all the darling squirrillies as melancholy orphans."

"May the good Queen bless the child for it!" piously exclaimed Lady Squirrel, putting her paws up for one moment and looking into the tree-top. "But let's have a romp first, and then I'll go to sleep while you talk about him."

So they had a mad scamper up to the top of the highest beech. They lived in the copse behind Jonas's cottage, you know, and kept watch on the old man's doings with timid eyes. The scamper over, they fetched from their larder at the roots of the tree a few fresh green hazel nuts, which they would eat only while the squirrillies were asleep because such things are apt to disagree with young stomachs. Then, as they sat up, one on each side of the trim nest, cracking, scraping and eating the nuts, a big hawk-moth perched on top of it and told them she was sent by the Queen to say that Davie's brother was in trouble and they must go and find him.

"What can we do?" asked Lady Squirrel, licking the tip of her tail contemplatively. "If we go and leave the nuts in the nest, we shall have to stop and see that the darlings don't eat them and get toothaches inside. If I let you go alone you'll be up to some foolishness and get shot again. And it's no use for me to go without you, when the only place I can ever find the way to is where you and the squirrillies are."

She turned to the nest and then saw four little red heads poking out, each of them with one eye tight shut to make

its mother think it was fast asleep, but the other wide open and winking like fun.

So there was only one thing to do: they must all go together—all six of them on a lovely night-scamper! Up they ran, father, mother, and four, along to the end of the outstretched bough, and then a glorious arrow-like leap, safe on the next-door tree. Three trees they put behind them in as few seconds. Then mother and four rested while Sir Squirrel sped to the topmost point to get his bearings. They had to avoid most carefully Jonas's garden, because of his black cat, and make for the farm by way of the fringe of stunted shrubs and trees and ragged hedges that lie between the uprising Downs and the wheat-fields. Here they met hundreds of birds asleep in the shrubs and trees: chaffinches, yellow-hammers, the common- and reed-buntings, and starlings love such places. But they leapt so silently that none were disturbed; not even those easily roused and timid creatures the wood-pigeons in the tree-attics.

Crossing the road at last they only just escaped attack by a pack of prowling, vicious stoats, who for once were taken too much by surprise at sight of a whole family of respectable squirrels out for a midnight escapade, that they missed their chance and a supper. Happily ignorant of the danger they had run, the squirrels arrived safely at the farm.

Now, the father squirrel himself, it will be remembered, had been at the farm once before. Though on that occasion he nearly died of fright and a torn back, he had kept one eye wide open, and, with perception as instantaneous as his leapings, had in few seconds spied out all the old house's possibilities. The same night that Davie and I made a

bed for him in the tool-house, he had—before setting out for home, and in spite of his sore, stiff back—run round the house to find out where Davie slept : the old timbers were as easy to climb as any tree. Davie, he discovered, slept with Kit in one of the attics.

The chief fear Lady Squirrel now had was our own "Proosian" cat. But where love and duty lie, everything else must give way ; and of the two risks, toothache inside or tabby-teeth outside, the latter to her illogical ladyship seemed at this moment the less. So across the road they shot, father, mother, and four, under the gate, up the brick path, round to the back, like six streaks of dull-red lightning, up to the dormer window, inside which they sat up in a row, demurely trimming their brushes.

Davie was sitting up in bed, softly crying to himself because Kit was gone, and he did not know where. Davie kept thinking he heard him coming back and wondering if he should go and find him. Having Kit for elder brother, he had hardly learned to take the initiative in anything. But his trouble was at an end as soon as the squirrels, father, mother, and four, came and sat in the window ; for Davie knew his little old friend at once.

You might think that none of them was any better off so far as Kit was concerned, seeing that they knew nothing of his difficulties. But Sir Squirrel was all his life making collections of odd things besides nuts and food, and hoarding them in strange larders that none but himself could find, though he often forgot where they lay. These stores, indeed, were queer and often crooked bits of information. They often needed to be fitted together before they were of any use, and sometimes a necessary bit in the puzzle would be missing.

Sir Squirrel whispered to his wife. Then Lady Squirrel fetched a green hazel nut out of her pouch, cracked it, and scraped it clean with her pearly little teeth. Sir Squirrel took it in his two paws, leaped on to Davie's little bed, and offered him the tempting morsel. Davie ate it gladly, and soon discovered that either he had become deliciously

smaller, or the tree-people were decidedly bigger than he had ever before realized.

"O, Sir Squirrel," Davie had no hesitation in asking, "please do take me to find Kit. I think he's lost for good, if you don't help him."

The five creatures now jumped down to the floor and sat up in a row by the bedside, where Sir Squirrel joined them. The little room had somehow become such a great place to Davie that the window looked as if it were half-way up

the Downs. Sir Squirrel shut his eyes and looked from side to side, up and down as if hunting in his brain-larders for things to fit together in the puzzle question, "*Where is Kit?*"

"I've got them all, Dame," he said at last to his wife. "I saw the boy leave his recorder with old Jonas, when I made him laugh. Then, of course, he went up to the magic gable in the loft. Then, did you see that bevy of foam-fairies scudding over our tree at sundown? One of them got caught. I rushed up to help her. But when I pulled a caterpillar off her, she laughed like a fairy bubble bursting and whispered as she flew away after the others, 'I'm after the others to find Kit! Such fun we're having!' Then there's that bad old ash tree where the Pigwidgies dwell. Kit's been there before and would have to go again. Then—the last bit in the puzzle—there's that nasty, smelly place, Galleybird's Hole! That's where we'll find him, Dame!"

Davie understood every word, and somehow knew that what his mother had said about his riding his squirrel was to come true. He slid down the round leg of his cot, and said:

"May I please mount, Sir Squirrel?"

The kind creature stretched his tail out and crouched down. Davie, though he had a little difficulty with his long night-shirt, managed to get astride. Then the thoughtful squirrel turned his tail forwards over Davie, and the child buried his hands in its deep fur and caught hold of the firm and bony tail to hold on by.

Then they leaped to the window and down the thick old wistaria branches that here cover the house; raced away to the hedge-rows, back into the copse, swarmed up a

great beech tree; then leaped from branch to branch and tree to tree, till they found themselves in Jonas's garden. O, it was such a glorious rush of a ride as never boy had before! and such a happy one—for was not Davie, for once, going to help his big brother? The only one of the seven who had any difficulty at all and who did not quite enjoy things was Sir Squirrel himself. There was, of course, nothing but happiness in having his protector Davie on his back, and the weight was a small point. The difficulty he experienced was in taking wide leaps without his tail streaming and steering behind him: he was obliged to let Davie keep tight hold of it. Two or three times he forgot that he must not let his tail go; but the moment Davie felt the pull backwards on his hands, he let the tail slip through. The only difference was that in these leaps he would be lying back on his mount, and his hands would be gripping the tail flying behind him. O, it was the jolliest ride boy ever had: no cross-country gallop on horseback ever came near it! But Sir Squirrel was quite English in his anxiety about a correct seat and the hang of a tail; he was on the whole glad it was night, so that no one of importance would see his unusual mode of leaping. He told Davie afterwards that he felt exactly like Lord Curdie, and sorrier for the noble dog's shortcomings than ever before.

But, now they were at Jonas's cottage, two things had to be contrived: first how to avoid the black cat, and second how to get in and fetch the recorder. There is one safe place in every cottage garden where a cat is afraid to go: it is in the middle of the well's windlass. The one nursery rhyme that every kitten learns is:

"Ding dong bell,
Pussy in the well!"

It is sufficient to instil a wholesome fear of water into the kittenish mind, though a kitten is too restless ever to get further than this in the rhyme. The mother cats pretend they know yards more of it ; but they can't remember about Tommy Stout, or they wouldn't be so much afraid of sitting over the well.

So they all swarmed up on to the windlass, where immediately the two old squirrels had some whisperings together that Davie could not understand. The result was that the boy had to dismount and sit quietly down beside the others on the windlass, holding on if he liked by Dame Squirrel's tail-tip.

The cottage door was very old, and one corner below was enough worn away to let a big rat through. Straight as a bullet for its billet shot Sir Squirrel ; straight as a bullet he went through. But, unlike any bullet I ever saw, he swarmed up the dresser, found the recorder—which, being a fairy one, instantly became adapted to anybody's mouth who needed it—brought it down and back to the hole in the door. To any one but a squirrel it would have been a puzzle how to get it through. But the way was clear enough. Into the wide end of the recorder Sir Squirrel stuffed his tail. Cautiously creeping through the hole into the garden again, the precious pipe was thus drawn after him and came safely through. It was then detached at once, because Sir Squirrel could not bear to look ridiculous before his squirrillies—unless it was quite necessary ! He put the recorder down, leapt upon the windlass, bade Davie mount again, and took the child to the cottage door. There Davie dismounted and picked up the pipe. Away again sped Davie on squirrel-back, holding on by one hand now, as he had the recorder to carry. They took the same round-

about and glorious way to the farm. A very common rhyme in squirrel nurseries is this :

" Straightest roads are always longest
When the day is done ;
Dancing boughs are always strongest
When the work is fun."

Perhaps it's truer than wiseacres know.

But this time it was quite necessary to go by the copse, for it was time the little squirrillies were fast asleep, and their lady-mother must stay behind to protect their insides by eating up the green hazel nuts herself. Davie was taken into the nest—so warm and sweet and soft a home it was !—and stayed just long enough for his friends to crack and scrape two more green nuts for him to eat. A little more of the fairy food was quite necessary, I suppose, if Davie was to keep safe when he got inside Galleybird's Hole.

Davie was glad to mount the creature's soft back again and to feel the strong, quick-leaping limbs in front of and behind him. For a moment, after landing from a leap, Sir Squirrel would squint round at him with one eye to see if the child was happy, and then with a cheery " Hold tight, Davie," would be off again.

But now they took a bee-line to the farm, and made straight for the barn. In they darted at the cat's hole of the big door and up the ladder at the gable end : the magic skylight stood open. In a very few seconds Davie dismounted at the edge of Galleybird's Hole.

There, and although they lost no time in deciding what use they were to make of the evil place, I must seem to leave Davie and the squirrel while I take up again the

thread of Trystie's discoveries. In passing, however, I must mention that in the morning we again found Kit fast asleep on the gable-platform in the barn and carried him back to bed. While we were undressing without waking him we noticed a curious musty smell about his clothes like decayed wood. As the mother shook out his smock, there fell and ran away a most evil-looking spider. Davie—you can imagine how bewildering it was!—had a lot of short reddish hairs sticking about his home-spun woollen night-shirt. Both he and Kit remained in bed all day sleeping in the most unusual manner. Curdie was nowhere to be found.

CHAPTER XV

The wonderful River and its gentle Creatures—Mrs. Lark again—The Fairy Castle

WHEN Trystie was told by Captain Leprecaun to open her eyes again, she could not see for a few seconds ; not that it was too light or too dark, but because she felt as if she had been sleeping and the things about her were all so unexpected. While her eyes were getting back their seeing, she heard her conductor finishing, as it were, some talk to her :

" So before ye can get home again, Princess dear, it's another pair of shoon I'll be making for ye. One pair to bring ye here, another pair to take ye there ; this is the way of it in Fairyland, if ye have no wish to be somebody else when ye get anywhere. And now it's leave ye I must to choose your own way ; for there's but one that'll take ye straight to your Godmother."

He paused a moment and then added very softly :

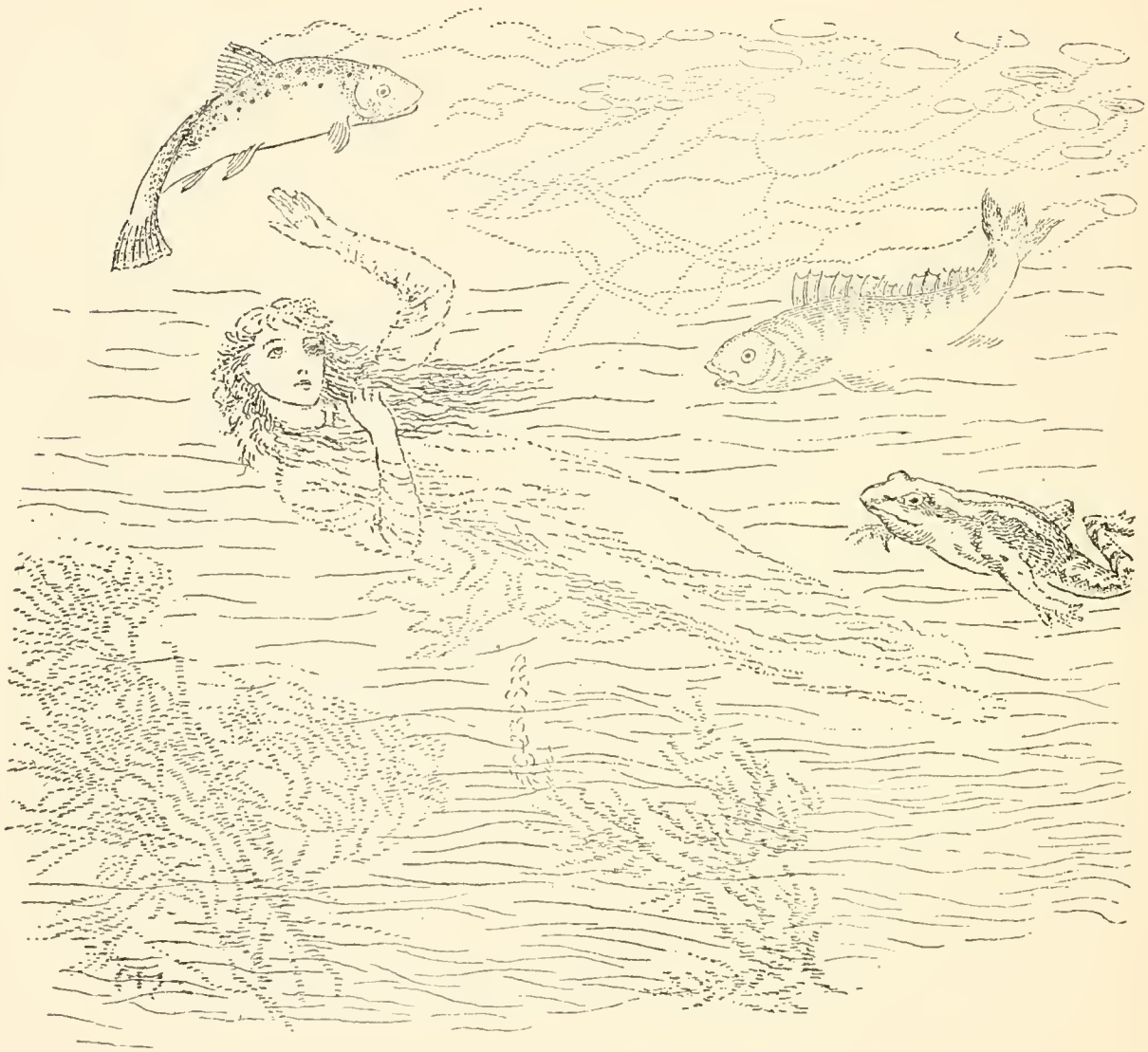
" I pray ye'll never scorn the little Captain ? "

Before Trystie could make any answer, or understood that he was leaving her at once, he was gone. She looked round, but could see no door or way of any sort behind her. She called after him :

" Captain ! dear Captain, good-bye, good-bye—and come again soon, please ! "

But the only response she could hear was the gentlest

sound as of water making music like a harp's as it sped in and out among the rushes. That it was all water about her she could not doubt, for she was carried along, her feet



hardly touching the floor of shining white and blue, green and red pebbles. But the water was somehow so good to breathe that she never thought how it was possible. Soon she saw and felt large silvery fishes stroking her sides and playing with the folds of her nightgown ; they were winsome and gentle things in their caressing ways. She stroked one

of them and then they all crowded about her, as if asking to be made friends of. Then she met, boldly swimming towards her, a great toad, with a pair of deep scarlet eyes looking wonderful in his great flat head. He wore a tight-fitting coat and breeches of Lincoln green. He stopped swimming, stood upright beside her—his head reaching up to her knees—and made his courtliest bow. Then he offered her a little webby hand so naïvely that she felt glad again and thought he was a very handsome fellow, beautifully shaped and clothed, and with such an interesting face. But she went on, saying to herself that half of her seemed to go because she wanted to go, and half because she must. The creatures seemed to understand her thoughts, for they all began to sing in silvery bright voices :

" *'Tis O the life of the River*
Rushing o'er pebbles and reeds !
And O the love of the Giver
Of life to the lilies and weeds !

" Love is the laughter and love is the weeping,
Love fills the brook and the sea,
Love is the rain-storm, love the rill creeping
Over the meadow and lea.

" *'Tis O the life of the River*
Rushing o'er pebbles and reeds !
And O the love of the Giver
Of life to the lilies and weeds !

" Blackbirds and blue-tits and silver-tongued thrushes
Drink and then lift up their praise ;
Columbines, lilies and river-grown rushes
Whisper their sweet roundelays.

" 'Tis O the life of the River,
Rushing o'er pebbles and reeds!
And O the love of the Giver
Of life to the lilies and weeds!"

Then there was silence but for the gentle Æolian music. The toad came back and in a rather hoarse, whispering voice took up the song again :

" Beyond our River are terrible places
Where Pigwidgeons glory in spite,
Where no flowers flourish but greed and grimaces,
And grinnings that children affright."

But the chorus of happy fishes sang loudly once more :

" 'Tis O the life of the River
Rushing o'er pebbles and reeds!
And O the love of the Giver
Of life to the lilies and weeds!"

In this way the fishes—such simple-hearted things as they were!—made the child see what Fairyland meant, though it would be many years before she would come to *understand* it.[1] She saw what this fairy river was doing for the country through which it ran ; and she realized for the first time that Kit's Pigwidgeons were no mere playthings of his own making, as they had pretended to be, but real and dreadful people who lived in a world of fear and greed and hate and grimaces.

Whether it was the music or the sweet air of the river itself, Trystie could not decide ; but between them it is quite certain that she felt a great uplifting of her heart.

[1] The mother says she doubts if we shall ever *understand* it, because we can never get outside it; but then, she adds, she does not see why we need to understand it at all as long as we are there!

This uplifting was full and radiant: it told her that the duty in her Quest had grown much bigger. The mere finding of the Iron Chest, the opening it, and the distributing of the little choose-keys which it held to a number of weary children, would not be enough. The Quest, she now understood, was harder than this because the children would first have to understand that they really needed the keys; that without them they had nothing worth calling life; that the things they had come to like and live for were just so much rubbish and must be got rid of. I do not think that Trystie yet saw clearly enough to put her discovery into these words: I think she only *felt* them at present. One thing, however, is quite certain, that somehow, and because of the song, she began to associate in her mind her former companions in the Goblin Town with Kit's Pigwidgeons. She had a fairly accurate impression as to what Kit's creatures were like. She had often seen them before they disappeared; and, since Kit's intimacy with Crickety, his increasingly vivid description of that one in particular had made her partly understand the nature of them all. Indeed, many days before she started on her journey, she had begun to fear that the boy was in some danger and might suffer at the little monsters' hands. So her Quest now became more eager, because she would be able to do something for Kit as well as for those companions of her earlier life.

Very quickly, it seemed to Trystie, the River widened and its current became gentler. She even told herself she would not have thought she was or had been in water at all, but for the little Captain's telling her so, and for the handsome toad and the gentle fishes and their singing. So she quite believed the River must be all about her still, if only

because everything was so sweet and jolly. Soon, however, there were no more silvery fishes to be seen. Instead of them, there were all the wonderful flowers of Fairyland; indeed, just pink and white roses, and red-tipped daisies and buttercups and primroses and wind-flowers and yellow globe-flowers and deep blue gentians and sky-blue milk-worts, and pink centaury and red rattle and starry purple thistles and rampion and golden gorse and pink rest-harrow, and every other lovely wild flower you can think of. There were all the birds of home also, and many from distant lands, such as yellow canaries and gorgeous humming birds and quiet green love-birds. You might think—though Trystie didn't—that such flowers and birds couldn't live under water; and you would be quite right, for they would all drown in the *common* kind of water. But this was a fairy river; and not one of the creatures Trystie saw could anyhow live outside it. Besides, there were the fish, which perhaps you think couldn't live in the air. They couldn't live in *common* air; but this fairy air is life itself to the good in things. As the Leprecaun once said to Trystie, "it's more fish there will be in the air than ever drown in it!"—which was nice and sensible! Presently, too, Trystie saw, darting in and out among the gorse-bushes and climbing roses, great numbers of little flat fishes, of all lovely colours. They flew about always two together; so that the pair of them looked like the two wings of a butterfly, and behaved very like a butterfly. Indeed Trystie couldn't help thinking that two such fishes would sometimes actually grow up into one butterfly; that this butterfly would creep inside a big blue campanula bell and come out a flashing humming bird; that this bird again would dart into a gorse bush and rise again on its topmost spike as a plain brown lark and

rush away circling into the sky and singing praises of sweetness and jollity, all to gladden the heart of its Queen.

And so the child went on her way, half because she wanted to go and half because she must. More and more larks were about her and fewer of the gorgeous birds and fishes. She saw larks' nests too, hidden among the grasses and gorse bushes—such great woven nurseries these nests were, so that even she, tall girl though she was, had to stand tiptoe to see the eggs or the chicks inside! The mother larks were as big as herself, though the father larks, singing a grand oratorio in the sky, looked no bigger than bees. The music was so wonderful that Trystie sat down with her back against a nest, the more easily to look up into the sky and listen. She wanted the music to fill her still fuller with gladness.

Over the side of the nest peeped Mrs. Lark.

"Is that you, Trystie?" she asked. "Well, I *am* glad! You ought to have got here before this, for you are wanted. Our Kit is made a King, because they couldn't frighten him. It won't do him any good, and nobody can do them any good—perhaps even the Queen can't. So we must get him away."

"Who have made him a King?" asked Trystie, now feeling very grave and really afraid for her dear Kit.

"Pigwidgeons!" replied the bird.

"Then I must go to him. Tell me where their country is, please," said Trystie.

"Galleybird's Hole."

"Where is that?"

"Nowhere that counts *here*, thank goodness!" said the bird enigmatically, and as if that was quite sufficient an answer.

"But how do I get there?" persisted Trystie.

"Get out of the River."

"How can I do that?"

"You can't, my child; *you* can't unless you take it with you."

"O dear, Mrs. Lark," said Trystie half in despair at the useless answers, "do be sensible!"

"Be sensible? Indeed no, my child!" replied the lark seriously; "I have great expectations from these four eggs and I mustn't. Have a peep at them if you like!"

"But what can I do?" again asked Trystie, after looking at the eggs, just to be kind, but not at the moment feeling much interest in them.

"Go to your Godmother of course, child," was the only answer. Mrs. Lark shook her wings out again, cuddled them over the grey, speckled eggs, and drew her head in, as if just a little bit hurt in her feelings. "There's her castle before you!"

Trystie looked up again and now saw that the larks were all swooping down in their diminishing spiral flight, circling a distant shimmering tower she had not seen before, and then rising again in widening circles. Thus the great choir music was increasing and lessening in wide throbbing waves.

But now Trystie had eyes only for the shining tower. She ran towards it, and much faster than her feet would have carried her without the river's help. Soon the castle came in sight and then the tower could be no more seen. The castle was built of great wooden beams and rough-hewn stones in between. It had over-reaching windows everywhere, and in between and below them were great wide round arches. Wherever Trystie looked in at the

lowest arches she saw into the loveliest garden, looking like a different one from each point of view. She had to go round and round the castle to find an entrance, but could not get up to any of these archways because of the moat. The moat was full to the grassy brim of some different kind of water from that in which she was still living and breathing. It was hard to say in what particular it was different, but Trystie thought it seemed *runnier*. Like the water of the fairy dew-pond, it rippled and flowed, although there was no wind at all, and certainly nowhere for it to run away. Riding at anchor on its waves was the same fairy fleet that had raced across the dew-pond—full-rigged ships, some of them three deckers, cutters, and schooners, old Spanish galleons, dragon-headed viking ships, catamarans, junks, proas, gilded gondolas, and quaint little coracles. Their gay flags were all flying merrily—flying away too and changing into birds—yellow buntings Trystie thought they must be !

As she was watching them a little pearly coracle came out from among the ships, swiftly paddled by a little sailor looking as light as thistledown but very strong of arm. He brought it up to Trystie. He said nothing, but without unshipping his paddle, offered the girl his hand. Then there was a delicious journey of a few minutes across the moat, towards one of the smaller arches that rose out of the water. A wood-pigeon—in the garden within, Trystie supposed—began to coo softly. The little boat rocked from side to side, and made Trystie so sleepy that she closed her eyes. She thinks she dreamed, and that in her dream the rocking continued ; she thinks she woke up again in a very few seconds, but would not open her eyes because she was so content with the rocking and the cooing of the bird ; only

it was different now, because, instead of being rocked, she felt as if she had hold of the boat's gunwale and was steadily keeping it gently going—to and fro, to and fro, to and fro. Still with her eyes closed, she now seemed to be sitting down on a low stool on a firm floor, rocking the boat beside her. All this time she must have been slowly coming awake, because when at last she opened her eyes, she saw beside her, on the bare earthen floor, a baby's cradle. Lying in it peacefully was a little baby with thick smooth short hair, and wide-open, blue eyes, such a loving mouth and never a tooth at all! It was only after a few seconds more of coming wide awake that she found the cooing was herself singing to the baby:

"River of Love
Laps round the cradle I rock;
Angels above
Call to the shepherds and flock:

"'Run, dance and leap!
For Love in the manger-bed,
With eyes blue and deep,
Shines in the poor cattle shed.'

"Sweetest of fun
The Babe to his father shall bring;
And—tears now all done—
With trust to his mother shall cling.

"Silver and gold
Gleam in the wild flowers' gifts;
Jewels untold
Rain from the heavy clouds' rifts.

"Shepherds now bring
Treasure in honey and fleece;
Wise men and king
Pray for the little one's peace.

"Oxen and ass
Wonder with big dreamy eyes ;
Lover and lass
Pray for their morning to rise.

"Song birds for joy
Scatter sweet carols of praise ;
Child, girl and boy,
Dance to old nursery lays.

"River of Love
Flows to the shining sea ;
The rainbow above
Gladdens each heart of the Three."

Trystie was not very much surprised to find herself singing so prettily. Nor was she a bit set up by it, because she knew it was the great River in her that made her sing. She felt more happiness than ever. For the River which had led her among gentle fishes and gorgeous flowers, which had made the larks' words plain to her, had now put her hands to this cradle to rock. As she sang she kept her eyes upon the baby. He looked at her with a great mystery in his deep eyes, reminding her of a radiant dawn breaking over the deep starry sky and the dew-drenched Downs. Indeed around his little head—there could be no doubt about it—was an aureole like starshine—faint and yet sure.

It was but a low wooden shed in which she sat with the cradle, and there was not much light. The open rafters of the tiled roof were above, and an uneven clay floor was below. Light came through cracks and holes in the weather-boarding ; and through one wider gap she could see the bright sunlit grass outside and one buttercup swaying in

the wind. In the buttercup sat laughing and singing, and holding fast upon the petals, its own little fairy, dusty all over with golden pollen. Was this home-like shed, Trystie wondered, the Queen's audience chamber ?

CHAPTER XVI

Kit is very thirsty—He gives the Pigwidgeons Justice, tempered with Mercy—His views upon Capital Punishment—The Garden of Silence.

OTHER rulers before the crowning of Kit, King of the Pigwidgeons, have been kept prisoners in the interests of their people. Indeed it is doubtful if any one could remain a monarch if he were as free as his subjects. The queen of the bees is at once the best served and the most cruelly enslaved of any royal person : if she tried to be free of her people's devotion and tyrannies, they would destroy her. Even the most independent kings are hedged in by observances and attendants and officers of state to such a degree that they may hardly sneeze without somebody rushing forwards to save them the trouble of doing it for themselves ! But the Queen of the Fairies is, as every one knows, different from all human rulers, because no one ever saw her seated on a throne—not though she is the Queen of queens. She is Queen only for the reason that she rules her own River. She has won the hearts of her subjects and her vassal queens —even though they are not by any means all quite good— because she knows the only way to be happy is to love all things that live, and to set the River free to flow through their hearts and their houses and their gardens and their cherry trees.

But our Kit did not think much about such things ; he was fully occupied with these two predicaments ; he had got to be a King as best he could, and yet he did so long to go home ! He once broke into terrible tears with his face in his Prime Minister's shaggy neck. Then Curdie licked his face all over and assured him that the Queen would find some means of getting his recorder to him. But for the dog, he would have broken his heart altogether, I think. He was really a brave boy, although he had been getting rather boastful.

You would have thought Kit felt afraid when he found the ladder was gone. Yet he did not, because he was angry.

" It's a beastly, beastly shame, Curdie ! " he cried, angrily stamping his feet, " and I don't care who hears me say it. I want them all to know that they *are* beasts, and ought to be put in prison."

This was a bad beginning for both King and people. But no one took any notice at all of Kit's remarks, so fiercely were they all snoggling. Certainly nothing could be done to get away at present ; and, as they were both very tired, they sat down on the floor to think.

The chief and immediate distress was thirst, and Curdie was suffering from it as much as Kit. The boy shouted at the top of his voice, hoping to bring some one. He called Crickety ; he called the Secretaries of State ; he tried to command attendance from caitiff lords, sorry varlets, pampered minions, cat-lapping poltroons, rascally sycophants (he pronounced this word *sigh-cofants*, having only read it), and even from lick-spittlers and land-lubbers, but all without the desired effect. The only answers he seemed to get were distant rumbling sounds like thunder. They came nearer and nearer, while noises of splitting and crash-

ing shook the place to its foundations ; they grew till they roared like mountain torrents with grinding rocks and uptorn trees swept before them. The walls of the great chamber gleamed dully and unsteadily. The floor itself began to sway and to heave, so that the King and his Prime Minister had to hold on to each other. Then other noises assailed their ears, because the whole population now snoggled and snored like a cityful of aldermanic pigs. The floor went up and down in solid waves ; the walls doubled up and straightened out again ; the domed roof seemed to burst and crumple up like an air-ball, and then stretch itself out into a hideous grin ; the crashing and snoring got even more frightful, because many Pigwidgeons seemed to come awake and added uproars of laughter to the turmoil and din. Kit told Curdie he was beginning to think about being afraid. But the good dog said to him loud enough to be heard above all the noise :

" Nothing to be afraid of, Master Kit. Don't forget it's only Galleybird's Hole, and the wind is knocking the old tree about and the rain is rushing and falling about the leaves and branches. The rest is silly shockle-tricks, that's all ! "

Then things were quieter. King and Prime Minister lay down and fell fast asleep in each other's arms.

After a good sleep, Kit was wakened by Curdie advising him, if he was rested, to go and sit on the throne, because the spiders were beginning to bring in the lanterns again, and the people might be angry if they found he wasn't spiked there. So he climbed up into it ; and, as it was soft and warm, he had another long sleep.

The day that followed would have been entertaining enough but for the crookedness of everything. The apples

they were given kept them from being quite famished, though the thirst was dreadful. Kit tried the plan of asking for instead of demanding something to drink. Crickety, who, being Home Secretary, had the domestic management in his hands, was puzzled at the strange request, and ordered a flunkey-monkey-pig to bring some oak-apples and baked broom-pods and things like cracknel biscuits. These did not offer much refreshment, and Kit explained that they wanted water. "And, by my halidom!" he added, "I *will* have it!"

"There's no such thing, gracious Sire, as water—never was," said the creature, now in a fresh uniform of yellow stripes, red buttons, and the breastplate brightly polished; "and if there is, it's poison! Have a suck at my bull's-eye?"

At that very moment Curdie said he could distinctly smell sweet, running water somewhere; and, curiously, at that very moment, Crickety's buttons turned pale, as he looked towards the archway they all feared, and said hoarsely, "The Creaky Cart, again! Which of us this time?"

Kit could never understand how they managed to get through the terrible long day that followed. Beyond all else, one thing stands out in his memory most clearly—the awful thirst. It seemed to be all part of his longing to get back home—to his mother's arms, to Trystie's help over his lessons, to Jonas and the sheep. But for Curdie's patient watching of him and encouraging him with wise words of sympathy whenever they were needed, I doubt if he could have lived through it.

Indeed Curdie succeeded so well that it was possible for Kit, in spite of the thirst and the hateful people, to play the King. He was determined to *make* his subjects good,

whether they liked it or not. In this unwise policy Curdie was not much clearer-headed than his royal master, because you can't *make* anybody good. Even the mighty Queen couldn't if she would. You see, if you force a person to be good, you only make him into a machine. Kit understood this before he got home, and now explains it to me.

"If," he said, "the Queen *made* things be good, they would never think what to do, and would be windmills. Then she couldn't be Queen any more and would have to undo all her magic."

But, though you can't make anything good by beating it, I am sure you *can* make it behave better; and at any rate that's pleasanter for the people who have to do the beating! The Pigwidgeons behaved shockingly. They were constantly ill-treating one another—snatching food away, tripping up, pulling tails and ears. They would break off each other's toes and gobble them up; they loved back-biting; they would try to google their own brothers' eyes; several would conspire and plot tricks against some particular Pigwidgeon, while each one in the plot would be contriving how he could best hurt his co-conspirator. So the din of yelling laughter and tearless howls lasted without intermission.

Kit and Curdie had their hands and teeth full, you may be sure. So severe was their ruling that, little by little, some sort of peace seemed to reign. The Pigwidgeons grew quite afraid of the laws which Kit quickly made. They became abject and cringing, but even greedier and hatefuller to look at. Kit's laws were these:

(i) Every one who hurts any one shall be hanged by his feet as long as he stops there; the spiders to do this execution.

(ii) Every one who is bit in the back or broke in the toes shall be hanged up too, because he does the same as he is done by when he gets a chance.

(iii) Googling is a shocking crime ; every one caught in the act or not, shall be hanged by the head and cut down again just in time.

(iv) All conspirators shall be bitten by the Prime Minister wherever and whenever his Right Honourable Lordship chooses.

(v) Because the Creaky Cart is a shockle-trick, anybody shockled by it shall be banished into the Garden of Silence.

Kit found Law No. V the best deterrent to crime. The Pigwidgeons liked noise, because it was only in moments of silence that they heard the Creaky Cart. So they thought it belonged to something they called Silence—something terrible and unknown beyond the dreaded doorway.

Curdie greatly preferred Law No. IV. He said anybody with teeth could appreciate it. What with the fear of Lord Curdie's teeth and the fear of silence, the Pigwidgeons really began to behave a little better.

Kit thought he was getting on finely—almost as if he was born to be a King. He tempered his severity with mercy, and took good care that all those he hanged were un-noosed and brought down again before it was too late. He gives me a funny reason for this :

Once when he was about six years old, Jonas, who, among his other accomplishments, used to be an ardent fisherman, had told him that you may go on catching perch as fast as you like, so long as a hooked fish does not wriggle off again and fall back into the water ; but that after such

an accident you will not get another bite all that day. Jonas said, "Them that is caught proper doän't never go back to tell the sad news; but him that jumps off, he ups and gives warning to t'others, and they doän't go no more after they fleshpots with fish-hooks inside of 'em like." Kit remembered this, he told me, when he saw the Pigwidgeons hanging up, because somehow they reminded him of the rows of smoked herrings he had seen hanging in a fishmonger's shop at Pixhaven. He thought if he kept his criminals hanging till they were quite dead, they would not tell the others what it felt like, and would be wasted. But if they were cut down in time and sent home, they would warn the others whose turn hadn't come that they'd better not be hanged, because it was terrible stretchy and choky! I cannot help thinking the suggestion a good one for our own upholders of capital punishment.

About the middle of that long day, Kit felt so tired of sitting on the throne that he determined to take the risk of letting the people see he was not impaled upon the skewer as King Parsnip had been. The result was that the Ministers of State, whose duty it was of course to attend the throne, trembled and turned so pale that they looked like things floured and ready for the frying-pan. They stopped talking and sniggling and were so quiet that many of them thought they must be dead. The quiet that began at the foot of the throne rapidly spread through the crowd of people filling the vast domed room. Kit says it was like a pebble dropped into a pond and waves of quiet spreading all over to the edges. The Pigwidgeons must have been convinced that their King was a wizard. Thereafter they always left a space around him and Curdie, greatly to their relief. Most particularly were the King and Prime Minister glad to have Crickety at

a little distance, because his pepperminted breath and his monotonous shifting of the bull's-eye from cheek to cheek were becoming very exasperating.

Now that Kit and Curdie could do as they liked, they set about exploring their kingdom, chiefly with a view to discovering where the ladder was kept, but also because of the boy's curious spirit which always made him want to know about everything. As they went along, however, the crowd making way for them everywhere, Lord Curdie fell behind and hung his shaggy head very sadly. Somehow he could not get as near his little master as he was accustomed. He realized that Kit was strutting about, no longer as if he were playing a part he had to play, but rather as if he thought he was really a very mighty boy. Curdie looked steadfastly up at the back of his royal master's head, possibly wondering whether his Sunday straw hat would not have to go to little Davie now !

Nowhere could they find the ladder—indeed there was nowhere high enough for it to stand except under the dome, and no passage straight enough for it to lie in. They went through every archway and every door but the one on which was written *The Garden of Silence.* Pigwidgeons in crowds confronted them everywhere and made way ; but no sign was there of any ladder. The one door they wanted most to go through was the Door of Silence. Kit hammered at its heavy oak, but his little plump fists made no noise. Curdie leaped and barked, but the only effect was a sound like falling rain and a fresh silence of the people. Then Kit heard the music of running water and it made him thirstier than ever. He put his ear down on the door, his eyes looking very big and his lips parched with thirst ; there was no keyhole. He heard the gentlest singing, and thinks the

words were these, though he couldn't understand them at all :

"Brave birds beat their wings to my singing;
In time with my song the wave breaks;
And hare-bells and sheep-bells go ringing,
While heather its tinkle-tongue shakes.

"From dark rocks my River comes leaping,
And free, like a lion, must roar;
In sunlight my river lies sleeping,
Or laps on the rush-guarded shore.

"Cling-clang songs ring out of my smithy,
When courage is welded with right;
And gnomes, ringing blows on my stithy,
Forge stars for the sorrowful night."

Though, as I say, Kit was not old or wise enough to understand—indeed I doubt if even I am !—what the song meant, he, of course, knew it was all about sweet and true meanings; so that he now felt much less thirsty, but wondered why the Pigwidgeons so greatly dreaded the door and all that was beyond it. It was a happy thing for both boy and dog to have come so near the other side—a better thing perhaps than if they had found the ladder. But it made Kit cry some bitter tears again—a better thing also than if he had been so self-content as to feel no need to cry. I think the tears washed out of our brave boy's heart some of the boastfulness, because, after his cry, Kit says, Curdie got close up to him again, and would have his ears pulled.

Again I have to point out that days and hours count for little in Fairyland. It is quite impossible to determine what length of time, how many days or hours, Kit spent with the Pigwidgeons. No sun shone whereby to guess the time. It was long enough, however, for both boy and

dog to suffer very seriously in bodily health. The food was altogether insufficient and the lack of water was making them both irritable. Curdie never at any time had fat to spare ; but Kit generally was plump and rosy and beaming to all the world with his happy heart within. Now, however, he soon grew pale and thin, and Curdie was so gaunt that his bones could be almost seen through his shaggy hair ; and his eyes were sunk. When he had to show his teeth in an official capacity, he did so with more temper than was natural to him, and looked fierce and angry. He was constantly yelping his absurd proverbs at the people, though of course they could not appreciate the little jokes hidden in the snarls to keep his temper within bounds.

" While there's life, there's rope ! " he once said, suddenly dropping his head and tongue on one side, as if choked. Another was, " Never too late to end ! " Kit tells me that Curdie sat down to utter this threat, as if suddenly remembering his own short-coming and trying to conceal the fact that *his* natural end was too far gone for mending.

Anyhow, Kit became sterner with wrong-doers, and began to wonder if he ought to show any mercy to those whom he hanged. But he still hated to be unkind : indeed from the first he always had the criminals' necks carefully padded with moss before the noose was slipped, so that the cord should not hurt much.

All things considered, it was high time for something to happen if they were to get home again. Fortunately, the Queen was not far away. I do not think she ever is. But, all the same, Galleybird's Hole was awful. There are some places into which the Queen of the Fairies cannot always go—even when she is most needed there. Galleybird's Hole was one of them.

CHAPTER XVII

Davie and the Squirrel enter Galleybird's Hole—Crickety is polite —The Coach—Davie is locked up in the Museum of Woes.

IT may be easy to dovetail a story nicely together when the writer makes it up and can do anything he pleases with his plot and people. But it is not so easy when the story is given disjointedly by three or four different persons, and the share of each marches separately from the others' shares, until they all meet together in—but that's telling ! You see, I have to tell Kit's adventures and Davie's and Trystie's and Robin's and Captain Leprecaun's, though I took part in only just the beginning of each set myself. Then Curdie had a lot to tell—though nothing at all of a tail ; and by the time he came home he seemed to have forgotten again how to speak English. Anyhow, I know *doggish* pretty well by this time, or Jonas would be quite justified in calling me a dandy shepherd.

All the time I have been telling about Kit's thirst and Curdie's high-handed—long-toothed, would be a better word !—dragooning of the miserable people in Galleybird's Hole ; or about Trystie's journey after Captain Leprecaun left her ; I have had constantly before me the fact that we left Davie with the recorder under his arm and mounted safely on Sir Squirrel's back at the crater-like opening into that horrible place. But, although we had to leave them there, they did not stop or hesitate a moment, except so

far as the stench almost knocked Davie down. But that was nothing to a country boy or a tree-top rodent. Davie dismounted, though he kept one hand twisted into the thick red hair of his friend's tail. Together they peeped into the huge crater—a deep dim-lit hole, surging with noise and fumes as though it were indeed a smouldering volcano.

"Sir Squirrel, dear," said Davie, white with fear, trembling with excitement; "if he's there, he's dead!"

Then the child began sobbing and trying to check his tears, all at once.

"O, nonsense, nonsense!" answered the furry knight quite cheerfully. "Buck up, little man; and I'll tell you a secret. Nothing can kill a *real* boy like our Kit. And Lord Curdie's with him. It won't do for us to be afraid, because Kit *must* have his recorder, or I don't know what will happen. Luckily there's nothing about trees and woodpeckers' holes that I don't know!"

So they started. But there was no ladder now—only the narrow shelf-like path round and round the dome.

Now Kit, as we know, was brave enough when he went down the ladder with Curdie; but then he was not afraid. Davie was even braver; for he went down a perilous path, more dangerous than any ladder, and did it in spite of being terribly afraid. Yet I think Kit would have been quite as brave, even if he had been afraid, provided he was going to help any one he loved as much as Davie loved him.

Sir Squirrel could see better than Davie, because he had blacker eyes and looked two ways at once without squinting. The only way down was round and round—something like a cage into which Sir Squirrel said he had once seen a cruel man put a little brother squirrel ever so long

"A great leap over the horrid thing"

ago ; and his little brother was still going round and round that path, year after year, and would never get anywhere till the Queen's River ran into the cage and she would call him into her own ship and sail away home with him. But this path, Sir Squirrel said, led down and down, round and round, and they would find Kit at the bottom. In this sort of way he cheered the little boy.

Davie held on with gripping knees, because the tail must now be left free for safety. He grasped in his right hand the fur of his red steed's neck. In his left hand was the recorder. He would not shut his eyes because he thought it better, when you are afraid, to see than to think. Right inside the hole the squirrel cautiously stepped ; then stopped to look about him. They stood on one side of the great dome. It must have been the Pigwidgeons' daytime, because the lamps were all hanging in their places. The path was the same as that taken by the spiders, and so the two had to go through a spiral avenue of hanging lanterns. Davie saw at once what they were ; and the glow-worms looked so pitifully at him that he could have stroked them, if that would have done them any good, though he always hated to touch any sort of worm. But when one of the hideous, black, hairy spiders challenged their right to pass, Davie hid his face for a moment in Sir Squirrel's neck. For the path, you must understand, was but a narrow ledge, precipitous on one side into the space below, and on the other bounded by the roof arching over them. The spider was three or four times as big as rider and steed together, and its legs seemed to reach out just as far as it wanted them. But the delay was only momentary ; for Sir Squirrel made a great leap over the horrid thing and landed quite safely on the path beyond. The same sort of difficulty—if such it could be

called—occurred five times before they reached the floor, though each time Davie felt less fear and greater happiness in the thought of finding his big brother.

But this was not to be yet awhile. Kit was all this time suffering badly from home-sickness and the incessant thirst, so that very naturally he was growing careless in his government. He found his subjects better behaved, as he thought ; and Curdie was so tired out that he was glad of a little rest to think about the sheep and the Downs and dinner-time. Kit was curled up on the throne, looking straight before him at the dog, who, lying down with head and neck flat on the ground, was dividing his eyes' attention between his master and the commotion in the dome above.

" Master Kit," he said without moving his head more than enough to open his mouth and speak, " there's a squirrel in the roof and somebody riding it."

" Go to sleep, Curdie," said the King rather crossly and on the point of crying ; " do leave me alone." Then he shouted at the top of his voice, " M-o-th-e-r ! F-a-th-e-r ! " but he was instantly silent again.

" There they go," persisted Curdie ; " such a flying leap over that spider ! " But he took Kit's advice, and no further notice.

The Pigwidgeons, it must be confessed, were not one bit better for Kit's severity or for the Prime Minister's stern execution of his laws. The only difference was that they secretly plotted the same sort of mischief which, under their late King, they had openly practised. While Kit was feeling more secure, he was really in greater danger than ever ; for they were trying to poison him with bryony berries, monks-hood, deadly nightshade, and poppy-seeds. They were too

ignorant to know that the poisons in these particular things waste themselves in fighting one another, and so did little harm to the person they were supposed to kill. Yet they made their King very ill. Curdie would not touch the poisoned food.

Just before Davie and his Squirrel reached the end of their perilous descent, Crickety saw them and Davie him. They recognized each other; for they had once met in the gable loft in the early days of Kit's experimenting. Crickety put a rooty finger on his huge lips to enjoin silence upon his attendants, and stepped on tiptoe to the place where the pathway reached the ground. They were far behind the throne, and neither Davie nor Sir Squirrel had yet caught sight of their friends.

The Home Secretary had now acquired a new expression—that of slyness. He even offered his hand to Davie, though still with his bitter smile; and he playfully pulled Sir Squirrel by the ears, greatly to the latter's resentment. But Davie shook hands, though it was a creepy thing to do, and said:

"Where's Kit? Is he quite well? Take me to him, please"—all in a breath.

"Pray be seated, Master Davie," said Crickety, though there was nothing to sit upon. Then he whispered to a flunkey-monkey-pig in attendance, "Tell them he's got Kit's sneaky recorder, and fetch the coach!"

Then out loud to Davie again:

"Your honoured brother is our beloved King, and the country has doubled its prosperity since he graciously ascended the throne. He will be overjoyed to see you. We will drive you in the state-coach to the throne."

Davie did not half like it, but sat down on the ground

and waited. Sir Squirrel sat down also, and began to brush his face with his paws. In a minute a black coach drove up with six of those beetles, known as *Devil's coach-horses*, harnessed to it. They curled their huge slug-like tails over their backs as if in mockery of the squirrel, and looked as vicious as they were black. Davie got in, the door was slammed, and off they drove at a tearing crawl, all pulling different ways. They went at last under one of the arches. Crickety, however, was there first. He opened the door, bowed profoundly, and said :

" This, your honour, is the Emporium of Toys—in other words, our Museum of Woes. *You* might call it a toy-shop —we are truthful and call it a woe-shop, though you can't buy them, and don't want them. When we've stuffed you comfortable, and put the works in, your royal brother will take much pleasure in examining you."

Then he kicked the beetle-horses to make them lash their tails, jumped into the coach and was gone.

Davie was alone now. The Squirrel was gone, but the child still held safely the recorder. All about him were shelves and glass-cases and tables packed with stuffed and tin-made creatures. It was a museum stocked with horrid imitations of every sort of good thing that the Pigwidgeons hated. One shelf was labelled " Dancing and singing birds all in a row " ; another " Blackbirds and robins and Christmassy snow." A glass-case, very securely bolted and barred, had written over it " Tom-tits and babies they come and they go." Another case was filled with bad imitations of brambles and thorny rose bushes and thistles and nettles and the withered petals of all sorts of flowers. It was docketed, " Kisses and cuddles and hearts all aglow." Then there were mechanical frogs and fishes

and funny snakes and caterpillars. Davie's fear was just giving place to some wonder and interest when the clockworks inside the things all began going at once. The birds and the ugly black-and-flat-faced dolls, dressed in long baby-clothes, began to chirp and to howl. The case containing the kisses and cuddles opened, and Kit saw that the thorns and nettles were really mechanical spiders which stretched out nippy, sharp claws pretending to pinch and scratch. The snakes lifted their heads, sneezed, and then winked apologetically; the frogs began to yawn, not forgetting to put their webby hands before their mouths; and the green caterpillars rolled over on their backs and stretched lazily. The buzzing and noise were horrid; and, but for one thing, Davie would have been terrified in spite of their being only stupid mechanical things. He says that as soon as their clockwork began to run down, they set about winding one another up again, which was so funny that he sat down and laughed. He said it was a comical thing to see, although he was so miserable, a worm poke its head into the side of a frog, and begin to turn round and round standing upon its tail; or a stoat leaping and fastening its jaws like a mongoose on a snake's back in kindness to wind it up again. I can't help thinking that, in the particular of this winding up, either Davie's imagination was at work to improve the occasion, or the museum specimens were half alive—like the Pigwidgeons themselves.

Tired at last of watching the things, Davie sat down and waited, with only the recorder for company. He wished Jonas had taught him as well as Kit to play upon it, though he had no idea in what way it was a fairy recorder. But he just shut his eyes, put his mouth to the pipe, and

blew gently. A sound came to his ears very like his mother's voice, saying, "Davie darling! the sun's up ever so high, and we've all done breakfast!" But he opened his eyes again and saw that all the specimens were gone back to their places—shelves, glass-cupboards, or tables—and had pinned the wrong labels on one another. Then he sat still—he was the most patient of all our children—and wondered how long it would be before Kit would come, and why Sir Squirrel had forsaken him. He was getting dreadfully thirsty too.

CHAPTER XVIII

Trystie meets her Godmother—She sees many Wonders—The Rainbow Curtain—The Ewer—She reaches Galleybird's Hole.

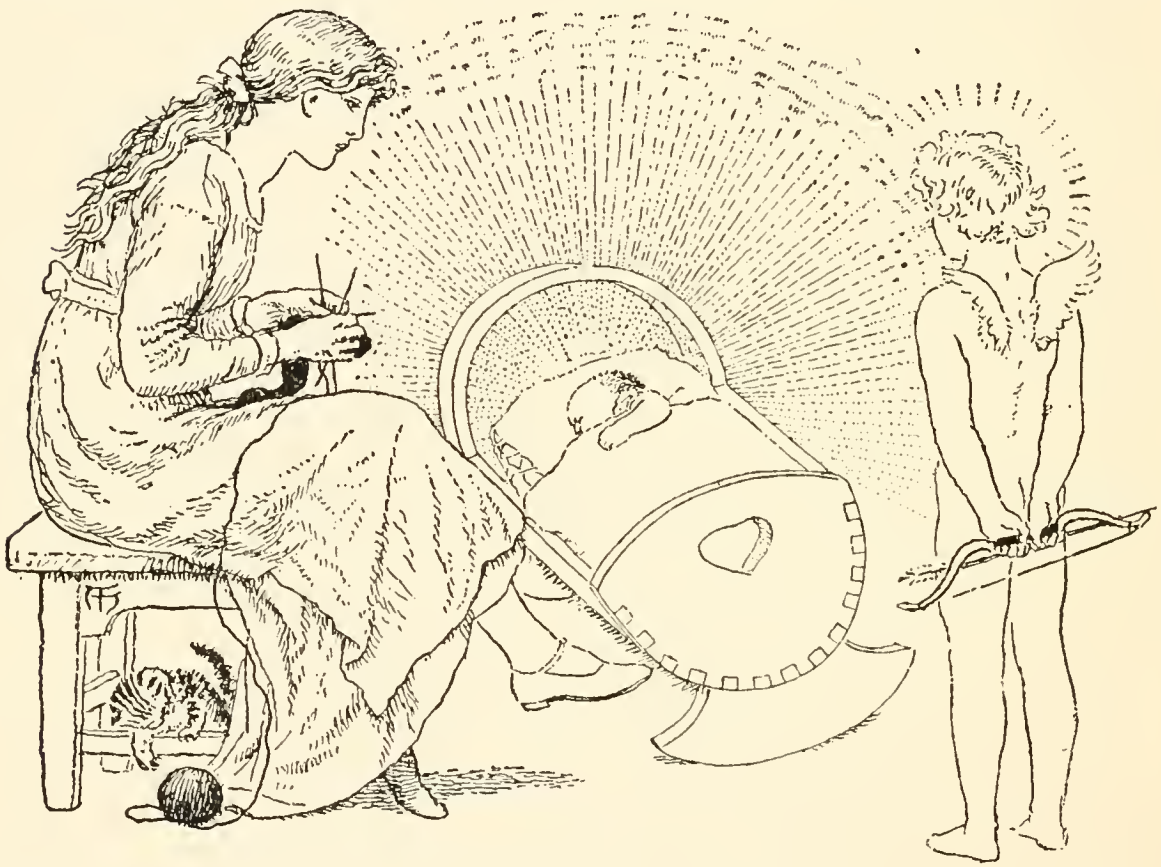
TRYSTIE still sat in the dark stable rocking that manger-like cradle with the wonderful baby in it. She watched the starry aureole about his head, and looked now and again through the gaping chink in the weather-boarding at the sunny grass and the little fairy, dusty with yellow pollen, laughing and swinging in her buttercup. The long stalk of the shining flower swayed up and down and kept time with the cradle's rocking, while the fairy, with her green diaphanous wings folded round her like a long garment, held tightly with her pink baby-hands to the yellow petals of her throne, singing this tiny song :

"Downward I swing,
Tickle my toes on the spikelets of green ;
Up again fling,
Laughing farewell to the emerald sheen !
Tightly I cling,
Clasping my petals so golden and clean,
Needing no wing—
Blue sky and green earth the joy flies between.

"Swing to and fro !
Who is it asks me his dew-cup to share ?
Why yes or no ?
Why should I wed while I swing in the air ?
In the hedge-row
Roses bow down to me ; daisies they stare
Down far below :
Swinging's far sweeter than cradles and care ! "

"You darling, silly fairy-thing!" exclaimed Trystie out loud; "what do you know about cradles and care? As though a cradle with its own baby in it was not the loveliest flower that ever grew in all the world!"

Then the door opened and the dark stable was immediately so full of light that Trystie could hardly see,



though she knew it was her Godmother who stood before her. It was in another of her palaces that the child had last seen her—on that occasion indeed when the Queen had given into her care Princess Honeypot, just before I and Curdie had the terrible battle with those shocking cuttle-fish. Now she stood for one moment looking like the beautifullest mother ever seen—taller and stronger

than Trystie's own mother, and only lovelier because, folded softly on her back, reaching above her head and down to her bare, shining feet, were two great wings. They were so soft indeed that you could hardly see where they began and where they ended. They were part of her grace and herself. They shone like the limpid colours of the rainbow. When they were stretched their widest, only those of her subjects who were nearest her heart—however far away they might be—could see them. More people see them than know it. When they see a strip of rainbow, it is often just a great feather at the tip of one wing ; and the rain that then falls in the sunshine is of the same nature as the Great River of Fairyland.

Glorious as the Queen now stood before her, Trystie did not hesitate a moment ; she just jumped up from the stool she had been sitting upon and ran into the loving arms. And in that moment the child grew into her womanhood ; and, with her childhood and her womanhood strong about her, she went into the very heart of life. Her Godmother lifted her, and held her close to her bosom as though she were a baby again. Then she sat down on the stool by the cradle—" her wings softly all over everywhere," Trystie explains to us ; and, with her godchild in her lap nestling close to her, she began rocking the cradle and talking to her—somehow without many words.

" Trystie, child," she said, " I want you to do something for the children you and I love, as well as finding the Iron Chest where the choose-keys are hidden ; something to do that I need you for ; something I hardly know how to do without my big Godchild. Will you do it ? "

" O, Godmother ! " exclaimed Trystie, made so happy

at these words, "of course I will! When shall I? Tell me about it!"

"The only way to tell you about it is to let you learn for yourself. I will show you some things about my castle—it is your castle too, everybody's—so that you can learn what it is you must do. Come, my child!"

The Queen rose, and the two looked at the baby who, though he had been sleeping again, now opened his deep blue eyes and held out his little arms.

"May I take him?" asked Trystie.

"Yes, dear child, he is your Saviour," answered the Queen.

So Trystie, holding the aureoled baby close in her arms, followed her Godmother. They went through another door into a great barn. Here there were so many cradles about, each with a sleeping, softly breathing baby in it, that Trystie could not count them. Then there were quite as many nests of all kinds with eggs in them, each built in a little fairy apple tree, or rose bush of its own. The eggs were transparent, so that the little curled-up chicks could be seen within, fast asleep. Again, in strange, dainty cradles of all shapes and colours, lay chrysalids, and within them could be seen, also in patient sleep, the butterflies or moths with their buds of wings. In still smaller places of safety—shaped like treasure-houses—lay, waiting and asleep, infant flowers, within which again were the beginnings of fruits; and, in the very heart of these, little sparks of magic which in due time would become treasure-houses and begin the everlasting miracle over again.

"Godmother! Godmother!" exclaimed Trystie, "O, Godmother!"

"This, Trystie," said the Queen, "is my audience

chamber—my nursery — the chamber of living sleep. Within its secret lie all things that live. Out of its secret come all that is miraculous—joy and triumph, I mean; beauty of wing and song, boy and girl; mother-love, father-love, and the Saviour Baby in your arms. Some mortal people would call it the chamber of death; but they are ignorant and unfaithful to their mothers. It is eternally the chamber of sleep."

"I understand, Godmother," said Trystie, and kissed the baby in her arms.

Then they went out into the Garden. It was full of children of all ages sitting under shady lime trees beset by happy bees. It was school-time. The teaching was all done so naturally and so happily.

"You see, Trystie," said the Queen, "as soon as any child has really learned anything, that thing becomes alive, and must get out and be given to everybody else who needs it. So the four-year-olds, as soon as they have really learned something—not sums and multiplication-tables, but things alive, such as helping and hoping and how to see inside the outsides—teach the two-year-olds; and the six-year-olds teach the four-year-olds; and so on. And when the girls are grown up and have babies to look after, the babies teach them more lessons—just as the Saviour Baby is now teaching your heart far more things than you would ever find in school-books or museums or all the libraries in the world."

"O Godmother!" again said Trystie—this time in a low whisper, as if the joy were too great for telling.

"Now, Trystie, my Godchild, you are needed for my work—needed to save Kit and Davie and Curdie!"

"Kit and Davie and Curdie?" exclaimed the child,

turning in dismay to the Queen. She had not yet realized the gravity of what the lark had told her. "Tell me! Let me go!"

"Yet I must seem to leave you, Child. For you must take my River with you into the land where the people say there are no such things as water and thirst. You must get out of the full River in which you are living and breathing, in which you found the Saviour Baby, or you could not find the dark place where the two brave boys and Curdie are prisoners and nearly dying of thirst. Nor could you reach the Iron Chest."

"Dying of thirst! I thought Kit was King? O Godmother, don't leave me!"

"Never will you be far away from me, Child; for though you will have to get out of my River, you will carry it with you wherever you go. Now, good-bye! But I think you will have to come back again to me before you have courage enough to find the boys and Curdie. If you are very, very brave you will be in time."

The Queen took her Godchild in her arms again and kissed her.

Then Trystie stood alone in a dark place. Her arms no longer held the Baby. But the sweet singing River was all about her, though she could not do anything but weep and weep for some minutes.

Then she heard her Godmother's voice:

"Trystie, dear Child, whenever you are in difficulty and catch sight of ever so small a rainbow—ever so small a feather of one—just step inside it, and you will be under my wing."

"Yes, indeed, indeed I will, Godmother," Trystie said with the last of her sobs. Then she began to run along

because there was something strong and sweet within her that made her brave for the boys and her quest of the choose-keys.

Now certain things began to happen which were of great importance to herself and her world and all of us who belonged to her. They are not easy for her to describe. They were so much the kind of things that are inside, and can't be easily told about because they have no exact outside by which they can be known. She makes this clear to herself by remembering that, though she never actually *saw* the Fairy River, she knew, through the way it made things grow, that it was quite real : the bigger and more beautiful they grew, the thirstier for more of it they seemed to become.

The day grew very dark. The banks of the River ceased to be green and flower-decked. There were no trees overhead, no clouds or stars to be seen. The bed of the River was hot under her bare feet. There were no fishes or birds —not even frogs. Often the stones would turn over in front of her, and a black snake would dart its head at her, shooting out a black tongue and showing long rows of black teeth. They all hissed the same things : " There is no River but in your silly mind ! " Or a great scorpion would wriggle out of a hole and brandish its horrid tail to make her turn back. But, though again and again she had to shut her eyes because the ugliness hurt them so sharply, she just pitied the lying creatures. Were they not, because they had no thirst, outside the River ?

She ran faster and faster, not from fear of the things she left behind, but from hope of those before her—the hope of reaching and bringing drink to the two darling boys and Curdie. The road grew rougher and blacker with great

deep cracks into which she fell again and again. It grew fearfully hot. Soon nothing at all could be seen. Then the noise of falling waters was all about her—just like giant rain pouring upon a giant tree, Trystie said—and streams of sweet cool water were running down upon her, as if from giant leaves, so that her nightgown was wet and clinging to her. Now she had to feel her way because of the darkness. Presently she saw in front of her a dim round disk of light. She thought it was the moon at first ; but it quickly got bigger and brighter till she came right up to it, and found it was a great hole in a wall before her, framed in a rough black border. Bad air seemed to be coming out of it together with the dim light. That she must go inside that hole, she knew. The lower edge of the hole came up to her knees. She leaned over to look how she must go.

Instantly she drew back, and began to shiver and shake with the horror of what she had seen. It was the sight of an ugliness, greater than any child ever saw before, that shook her. The ugliness seemed to rise and strike her eyes, making her for one moment feel that the River was dried up within her, that she too had no thirst, that all she had seen and learned and loved at home and in Fairyland was mockery. But she can never find words to tell exactly what it was she saw. Probably it can not and should not be told. It was, of course, Galleybird's Hole into which she looked ; but, amidst all the disgust and vileness of the place, she saw no one she loved, and did not even think the boys and the dog could be there.

At this, the very worst moment in all her life, Trystie saw shining across the dark hole—dim but quite clear—a bit of the Rainbow looking like a fluttering curtain. In a moment she knew that her only chance of saving the

boys and
winning her
quest was to
get for one moment
through the seven-
fold colours into the
River, and then, in obe
and trust, to step out of it
though it might be into t
her and endangered the Fa

Little wonder is it that

edience
—even
he very horror that had shaken
iry River.
the brave child began to weep

yet again—but only for one moment; in the next, with her right hand and arm she climbed on to the edge of the crater and into the dim curtain of rainbow light.

Instantly she found herself once more in her Godmother's arms. For perhaps half a minute—no longer—the Queen held her and covered her over with her wings. Then she said :

" Trystie, I am proud of my brave godchild. Lose no time now. Take this silver Ewer and never let it leave you. Go into the kitchen and fetch the boys' two mugs, and the carved bowl. Stay and comfort your mother. Then come back again ! "

She kissed her again : " Go now ! "

Then Trystie, quite naturally, took just two steps into the kitchen at the farm. Her mother was sitting with her head in her arms on the table, looking like despair. Trystie felt she could not speak directly to her. She must, nevertheless, give her some words of comfort about the boys, even though she knew no more than one thing about them, namely, that the Queen was taking care of them. This was, indeed, just the sort of occasion when music will say things which have no utterance in common words. So Trystie continued the song that had risen to her lips as she rocked the cradle :

" When the storm is undone,
The sky blossoms red in the west ;
Then birds, one by one,
Come home, in the tree-tops to rest:

" In the grave buried deep,
The lonely seed opens her eye,
Forgets the dark sleep,
And lifts up two green arms on high.

"No child can be lost:
For Hope will bring back the old joy:
Though hoary with frost
He shouts from his heart, 'Spring ahoy!'

"Though waves leap and roar,
Brave Hope's gallant ship will prevail:
Though storms beat the shore
'Tis Trust fills the home-coming sail!"

Then, without another word, the child took down from the dresser two mugs and the carved bowl. With one more look at her mother, and holding the Ewer in her right hand, the wooden bowl with the two mugs in it under the same arm, she left the kitchen by the garden door.

By which same door she went, step by step, down into Galleybird's Hole. But before she had time to look about her, she knew she was holding in her own left the soft hand of some little person.

CHAPTER XIX

Robin's Air-ball becomes alive again, and the River Water does wonderful things—Kind Miss Duckling—Kit and Davie revive.

THE mother and I cannot feel quite sure of the exact hour that Trystie came home and took away the two willow pattern mugs and the wooden bowl I had carved outside with grapes and vine-leaves. It must have been near midday. She had been sitting up all the night with Kit and Davie. They were both ill with some sort of sickness the doctor could not understand. They had no fever, he said, but were rapidly growing thinner. Their lips were dry and their skins dry and cold. But they slept like two logs, though sometimes talking nonsense in their sleep. Three nights and days they had been like this. The mother had sat up each of these nights, getting but snatches of sleep in the daytime. The morning before, a bright sunny day, Davie had waked up for a moment and looked quite well, but soon fell asleep again. Early that night, Kit had shouted at the top of his voice, " M-o-th-e-r ! F-a-th-e-r ! " so that the old house rang with it ; but she could not make him realize that he was in her arms. He soon fell asleep again. A most puzzling point, though there was no apparent reason for associating it with the boys' illness, was that the clothes Kit had worn on the day before he fell ill had, boots and all, disappeared.

The morning of which I write was gloomy and drenching

wet. The mother was almost worn out, and her heart seemed like to break. I left her at last asleep in the kitchen. She had put her head down on the table, too weary to hold it up longer. Somehow, even in my grief, I noticed her pretty neck and the innocent little curls that, taking advantage of her disordered days, had got out of bounds. I left her, treading as quietly as possible with my heavy boots on the brick floor. Every now and again I returned to peep in at the window ; but, seeing her still sleeping, I would leave her again. The last time I looked in, she had just wakened ; and I wondered to see the serene—if hardly yet happy—light in her eyes. I went in to her. She greeted me with something of her usual sweetness.

" I've had such a wonderful sleep, Shepherd," she said, looking at once into my eyes and far beyond them ; " I know the boys will be well again—and very soon now, I think. Trystie has been here, and has taken away their own two mugs and your wooden bowl ! Look," she added, " they are gone ! And I feel as if she had brought to me some sort of happy news—but what it is, I don't know ! "

Yet still Kit and Davie were ill. Whether it was the rain that did not cease pouring down in torrents the whole of that day, or whether it was that Robin was fretting for his brothers, we could not say ; but this child too was now growing restless and pale. He would do nothing but sit by the twins in the parlour rolling up and unrolling the string of his burst air-ball—which for many weeks he had cherished—or stretching out its rubber as if he would fit together the rent in it. The powdery blue of it had long vanished, and nothing was left of it but a rag. Yet to-day the child seemed to be lavishing his heart upon it as a little girl spends hers upon a tattered doll.

After dinner I had gone up to see the boys and had thought them both better, though they would still take nothing but milk, and only if it was put into their mouths. When I came down again, the sun suddenly shone out, and Robin too in sympathy.

"Father," he suddenly exclaimed, in great excitement, "there's Davie's squirrel in the orchard. I do believe my fairy-airy ball is going to fly again!"

Barefoot, he ran out into the garden and through the wet orchard, the squirrel leaping before him, and carrying in his mouth two queer nuts on one stalk. Robin disappeared into the cow-byre. Then I looked up to the sky, and at the ripening wheat which stretches away towards the copse and the Downs beyond. A good farmer always has a fatherly feeling towards his crops, hoping his management will prove fruitful. My wife had eaten some dinner; so I was happier. "It's a queer day, Mother," I said; "there's more mischief brewing, for all the bright sun and a lovely stretch of blue sky! But certainly the boys look better; and I begin to wonder if Curdie has something to do with this queer illness."—Not a soul had seen the dog since the boys began to be ill.—"I feel as if they were really away with him somewhere—perhaps with Trystie in Fairyland. But the boys certainly *are* better, and quite a bit like themselves. Kit really *drank* the milk just now and seemed to know me for half a minute. If you really think Trystie has been home, that makes me a deal happier."

"There's the mugs and your bowl!" asseverated the mother. Seeing that they were certainly *not* there made her remark decisive and unanswerable.

Robin told us afterwards that what made him run out into the sunshine was because the squirrel "wunk" again,

and made him feel quite sure that all his air-ball wanted was the sun and wind to mend it. He lost sight of the squirrel, it seems, directly he reached the orchard, and then went into the cow-byre because he thought the little creature must have run in there to play hide-and-seek. But, as he could not see him anywhere, he sat down on the milking stool to think what he should do. It was dark in there after the bright sunshine, and his thoughts were arrested by a wide crack in the weather-boarding, through which he saw the long sunny grass, and one extraordinarily big buttercup swinging to and fro in the wind. In it he spied, sitting on the edge of one petal, a little fairy, with her feet in a pool of rain through which the carpels and anthers were standing. She was splashing and kicking water out with her toes. The child ran out again and round the wooden building to make friends with the little person. When he got there the buttercup was taller than ever, right up to his shoulders; the flower itself was as big as his porridge-bowl, and the fairy lady just as big as she would be.

"Have a drink, Robin?" she said sweetly.

So, of course, he put his mouth to the golden cup, and the fairy tipped all the sweet rain-water into his mouth. Then she laughed "like trickling," Robin says, and began to swing again. By the buttercup's side the child then spied his favourite flower, a huge harebell. It was an unusual place for it, and he plucked it low down and quite easily. Then, as he looked up at it, it grew bigger and he saw it was not a harebell at all, but his own air-ball, as sound and blue as ever, and even more airy. Up and up it went and—O lovely, lovely!—himself with it. Up and over the barn they flew till the wind dropped. Then they gently slipped and softly

"Up and over the barn they flew"

bumped down the mossy tiles of the roof under the ash-boughs, and quietly landed in the corner between the outside of the barn and the ash's great trunk. This was strange, because this corner was the one and only place about the farm of which Robin had always been rather afraid.

It seemed to us at home, that is to the mother, Kirstie, and myself, that Robin soon ran home again looking so flushed and sleepy that he was put to bed at once. So now all three boys were strangely unwell. There could be no doubt about this. Yet, at the same time, we cannot doubt that in the dark corner by the ash tree Robin found Trystie waiting for him. She has told us all about it. She was carrying in her right hand a silver ewer shaped like an acorn and shimmering with rainbow colours "as if the raindrops were loose inside and the sun outside it"; and under the same arm she carried the carved bowl with Kit's and Davie's mugs lying in it. She took Robin's hand in her left, and they walked further into the dark corner, which now, the child saw, had a little door in it. They pulled the latch and went down some steps into the dark. Before the door had closed behind them, hideous cries met their ears, and among them the children heard again and again the words:

"The Creaky Cart! The Creaky Cart!"

It was now that Trystie realized that she had climbed out of the River, and that the effort at doing so had not been so terrible as it must have been had she, when she first looked down into Galleybird's Hole, allowed fear to conquer her. Instead of giving it opportunity for doing this, she had just done what she had been told to do by her Godmother and gone through the rainbow curtain. Each step thereafter was one of obedience—the return home, the

taking of the mugs and the bowl, the carrying of them whither she was led, the taking of the little hand put into hers beside the old ash tree. Each was obeying the River-light in her ; and each was a step towards the River's bank. Now she had got right out of it, but had brought with her the silver Ewer of Fairy Water and—Robin !

In my mind I can see our brave Trystie standing there in that low round archway, over which was written *The Garden of Silence ;* clad only in her nightgown and her thick, long black hair ; holding by one hand the little boy with his bare legs and feet, his loose-hanging smock, his blue eyes and straw-coloured curly hair, and holding fast his blue air-ball. All about her stood at some little distance, as if terrified at her, a crowd of the ugliest mockeries of life conceivable.

Robin seemed to have no fear with his hand safe in Trystie's. She says he hardly seemed to realize the horrible creatures, so happy was he in holding his air-ball again. For her own part, she tells us, the sense of horror that had assailed her when she had first looked down into the hole upon these Pigwidgeons, seemed to have fallen away from her and to have given place to a sense of great pity, so that she wanted to help the miserables out of their ugliness.

Trystie moved towards them. The Lady of the Wardrobe—as Trystie afterwards understood her office to be—came forwards, looking rather pretty in the mole-skin coat. But she immediately turned and rushed back, exclaiming, "She's dragging it in—the Creaky Cart !" Then she fell down and lay still.

Trystie knew that cold water poured on to the face of any one in a faint quickly restored her. So she went up to

the Wardrobe Lady, while the crowd retreated further. She kneeled down by her and gently poured a thin stream of the River from out of the silver Ewer over the white face. The water shone as if in sunlight, and around it played a faint mist with rainbow colours dancing upon it. The poor little white face came alive with the flicker of a real smile upon it. She sat up and held out her unshapely hands, in one of which, Trystie then saw, she was holding a piece of dirty white tape neatly tied into a bow. Trystie, giving the two mugs to Robin to hold, poured more water into the wooden bowl, and gave it to the lady. She drank deeply and slowly—as though she had never done such a thing before.

The Pigwidgeons had stood speechless and silent, but now began to utter crowds of timorous whispers :

" Old Boney's got *her* now ! He'll chuck her down alongside of King Parsnip, perhaps, and then she'll be happy ! " and the speaker giggled. " Like everybody else, she was always in the way ! Who's next ? "

" Thought he wanted a lot of us this time."

" Never heard it so awful creaky-squeaky in all my born days ! "

" He won't want me till I've done my peppermint. It's my lucky stone, it is—sure as pig-tails ! " This speaker was Crickety.

" Don't care what he catches, if it's not me ! "

" Everybody can get along better without the others, so it don't matter a snout to me ! "

And so on.

" Are you coming alive now ? " asked Robin of the patient.

" I don't know. But it's different now I've had that.

Why," she exclaimed, "I can *see* you—two creatures like King Kit. Where's the Cart? I can't hear it creaking now. Am I taken?"

"I don't quite understand," answered Trystie; "but nothing has taken you, lady. You have drunk the River water—that's all!"

"May I have a little more, please?" she asked, beginning to look quite gentle through her silly prettiness.

"Yes, indeed," said Trystie, pouring out more of the precious water. "My jug, I think, will always be full. But will you get up if you feel better, please, and take me to Kit and Davie?"

"Is that the King and his brother? Yes? Well, they're shrivelling up fast, and their eyes are getting bigger every day. Crickety says they'll both be shockled when the Creaky Cart comes for them, and *then* he'll google them. But I think I always hoped he wouldn't. *Now he shan't!*"

The three then started running across the vast room. It seemed to Trystie like a mile. Robin asked the poor lady her name, but she said she had no name—nobody had. Then she asked Trystie if she had a spare name she could give her, because, after that lovely drink, she thought she would like to have one. She said the only one of them all that had a name, now that King Parsnip had been fetched away in the Creaky Cart, was Crickety; and King Kit had given it to him. He was a kind King, she added, but fretted for stuff he called *water*. Was the River made of water? she asked.

While Trystie was thinking for a name that would do, Robin asked the sad lady if she would like to be called *Miss Duckling*, because she took to the River so naturally.

To himself he thought it should be Miss Pretty Duckling, because she was already growing *really* pretty—not only Pigwidgeon-pretty ; but, being a polite little boy, he did not say all he thought. Anyhow, the lady was thereafter quite happy to be Miss Duckling.

When they got to the throne, a sight met their eyes that would have been too terrible to bear but for Trystie's hope in her Fairy Water. It was not so bad for Robin, because in the two white and worn faces, the thin hands and slender legs, he did not recognize his brothers. They lay huddled up in each other's arms on the throne and quite insensible to anything around them. Kit was gripping his recorder tightly. Underneath the throne lay on his side the flattest, boniest sheep-dog ever seen.

" Robin," said Trystie, fearing the little child might be frightened if any of the Pigwidgeons came nearer, " keep hold of Miss Duckling's hand ; she needs it."

Then, with white face but steady hand, Trystie poured the Fairy Water over the boys' heads. It ran down off the throne in a running stream and over Curdie. It ran, and deepened as it ran, till it flowed over the steps and under the doorway into the Garden of Silence. The Pigwidgeons fled pell-mell in fear of the thing they had never seen before and could not believe in. As they ran they shrieked yet again, " The Creaky Cart ! "

Kit and Davie sat up, but could hardly yet see because the deep sleep they had been living in had almost carried them too far away to come back again. Trystie filled Kit's mug, and gave it to him to drink ; next, Davie's, and gave it to him ; then she filled the wooden bowl and set it before Curdie, who had staggered on to his legs when the water ran over him.

It seemed to Trystie and Robin that they stood before the three beloved thirsty creatures for ten or more minutes before they stopped drinking. When at last their thirst was over, the boys' colour came back and they looked quite like themselves although still very thin. They jumped off the throne and clung to Trystie and Robin laughing and crying and telling them all about it. Curdie gave but two leaps at Trystie, and then, wise old dog, saw that he might wait his turn. So he just went up to Miss Duckling and apologetically offered her his paw, smiling in his quaint and winning fashion.

It appeared that the Wardrobe Lady was the only person about the court who had the vestige of a heart. She had been treated as a social pariah ever since one drop of rain had fallen upon her head through the crater opening in the roof. Such a thing had happened now and again before this; and the people all hoped the Creaky Cart would soon be sent for any unfortunate person who had been touched by even one drop of living water. All rain is living water, though sometimes we can't understand why on earth such a lot of it is needed!—Well, among Miss Duckling's duties was that of curator of the Museum of Woes, where she had found and at last taken pity upon Davie, and brought him with the recorder to his brother the King. But by that time Kit was too weak and his lips too dry to play upon his magic pipe; indeed he could not even remember what it was for.

Now, if I were making up a story that would arrive quickly and properly at a happy ending, I should find the time was now come for taking all the children and Curdie home. I should perhaps have to make the boys get well from an illness to find they had been only dreaming all

about the Pigwidgeons and the rest of it. But this being a truer story than an ordinary made-up one, it doesn't have a happy ending just because there is no ending to it all; it runs out and away beyond the book like the music out of Kit's recorder, and no one can say where it will stop. I don't say the *book* does not end happily. I only say the story does not end at all, and that the children had more troubles and more joys to get through before they could be quite and altogether at home again.

The truth is that, at sight of the little merry river running away from under the throne and out into the Garden of Silence, the Pigwidgeons knew that they were in a tight corner—up a tree, in fact, as people say—unless they did something. So they laid and hatched a desperate plot.

CHAPTER XX

The Pigwidgeons rebel—The King is dethroned—The Battle of the Tree Folk against the Pigwidgeons—Davie to the Rescue.

THE little stream of water that Trystie poured from her Magic Ewer over the boys and Curdie did not stop flowing even when she ceased to pour. It bubbled and flowed, up and over, till it became a little singing brook, and made a deep channel for itself. It ran away, swift and sparkling, giving light in the gloomy place, till it disappeared, as I have said, far away and under the door into the Garden of Silence. Its banks, too, began to grow grasses and rose-campions and yellow irises and sprawling briar-roses and sedate spindle-wood trees; so that the vast room, which in spite of its size had been an inside place, was now all out of doors. The roof and its lanterns could be no more seen; but the sky, if it was above them, was hidden by fleecy clouds. The air was as sweet as a May morning's.

To people who understand neither Pigwidgeons nor the many ways in which the River does its work, it must seem unaccountable that the first thing it appeared to do for these shocking people—who never had the grace to be thirsty and denied the existence of any kind of water—was to excite them to rebel against the King they themselves had set up. Yet the explanation is quite simple.

The River brought into the place for the first time some real life ; and for the first time since they had been little innocent babies, the people began to feel something stirring them to a new activity. But, their hearts being very wicked, they straightway put this wonderful gift of the living water to the worst use. They used the new feeling of life to get rid of the only good thing—beyond an occasional drop of rain—that had ever come into Galleybird's Hole—namely, Kit. They had tried to do this from the very first by shockling him ; and they had failed. Immediately, however, the water had come and taught them how to like one another a little bit, they discovered the secret of working together for a common object. Hitherto every one had been too suspicious of his neighbour for this ; but now they plotted to destroy the little King whom they had set upon their throne.

All boys and girls who have learned history wisely, know that many rebellions are necessary and are often nobly carried through. Others, although undertaken necessarily, and with no other intention than to destroy injustice and cruelty, lead to worse things than ever before, because the rebels put to ignoble use their newly discovered hope and strength. The French Revolution was like this. But the Pigwidgeons' rebellion was begun wrongly and unnecessarily —and not less so that the Fairy Queen's pure River alone had made it possible. Thanks, however, to Trystie and Captain Leprecaun and Sir Squirrel and the brave Kit and the thoughtful Davie and the trusting Robin and the faithful Curdie, but above all to the love of the Great Queen, it worked in the end for even the Pigwidgeons' good—as you shall hear. In no way is the Queen's power more wonderful than in her bringing good things out of bad—in making

roses and butterflies and cherry trees spring out of rubbish heaps.

Crickety it was that first saw how easy it would be, if all the others would obey him, to destroy Kit and Curdie. He made a speech, though constantly interrupted by the demands of his bull's-eye and the applause of the people.

"Fellow Pigwidgeons, most noble comrades! (*Hear hear!*) It's all up with us unless it's all down with the King and Lord Curdie. There'll be no noise and snoggle any more for us unless we plug up the hole where that fussy River bubbles up. (*Down with it!*) What the thing's made of I can't think, with its giddy light and nasty weeds. Look here, you fellows! I'm going to be kind, I am, though I haven't much experience of it. I'll be your King now the skewer's gone, and soon have things nice and noisy again. (*Feeble cheers.*) We'll torture King Kit till he tells us where the peppermint-bulls live that he googles the eyes out of. (*Google him! google him!*) Then we'll stuff him head first down the hole where the river leaks out, and Davie next and—if he'll promise not to bite—Lord Curdie on top of them both. Then we'll get the squeaking recorder and plug it up too. (*Hoorah!*) Snoggle and snouts! if that don't stop all the nonsense, bull's-eyes ain't peppermint! That fright of a she-girl who brought the River, and that he-boy with the round bit of blue sky tied to a string, shall be shockled and googled! (*Shockle 'em! shockle 'em!*) Three cheers, my noble Piggywidgies, for King Crickety and the Peppermint Bulls!"

Kit was quite strong and well again now, but Davie still looked frail. The three boys and Trystie listened attentively to the great speech, though Kit was laughing all the time! Curdie stood by growling and contemptuous. It

will be observed that Crickety always spoke respectfully of *him!* With puzzled look, the big dog turned his head from Kit to Trystie, from Trystie to Kit, and then at the gathering crowds, as if waiting orders. Trystie was grave, but quite serene. Robin danced his air-ball up and down, but kept fast hold of the string. Trystie says she doubts if he ever quite saw the Pigwidgeons the whole time he was among them. But Davie, his nerves perhaps shaken by his confinement in the Museum of Woes, and not yet quite strong again in spite of the Fairy Water that had run over and into him, clung to Trystie's arm and buried his face in it, as if in fear of the dreadful creatures. The children were standing among the irises on the bank of the gently flowing River. Trystie realized Davie's danger if he allowed himself to be afraid. So she led him two or three paces to the edge of the water, and bade him stand in it. Then the colour came to his face again, though he would not let go her hand.

Crickety now jumped up on the throne and pointed a long tapering finger at little Davie.

"Thought I had you that time," he said threateningly. "But you're a little Woe, you are! (*Hisses.*) Mark this, my faithful subjects! When he touched that River, the shockle stopped. It's poison! Let no brave Pigwidgeon go near it—or he'll be carted away. If we don't get rid of the he-boys and the she-girl at once, something will happen. It's poison for things to happen. That's what the Creaky Cart does! (*Groans and sighs.*)"

Now, notwithstanding the constant fear in which the people stood with regard to this Creaky Cart, Kit had never seen it or heard it. It seemed too absurd to be afraid of—something you could neither see nor hear. Kit knew that

you can believe in lots of things you cannot see or hear, such as kindness and bravery and obedience. But a Creaky Cart ! There was no sense in it, no reality ; and yet these ridiculous and wicked Pigwidgeons believed in it !

No sooner had Crickety said this about the Creaky Cart than Kit heard a sound like the breaking of little sunny waves on a pebbly shore, and then, quite clearly, the distant tinkle of sheep-bells and a lark's song ever so high above the world. The sweet, real sounds made him long for his home and his mother and a scamper on the Downs. But the memory of these things was driven away by the harsh voices of terror all around him.

" The Creaky Cart ! " they cried. " It's coming up out of the river. Run for your lives. Let it swallow up the ugly children ! They'll stop up the hole in old Boney's heart for a bit ! "

Crickety and all the people now ran away in a fury of fear, tumbling over and trampling one another. The children thought they were left alone by the sweet little river. They could see the jolliest little silver fish shim-shimmering in it, as Robin says, and some as gorgeous as butterflies.

" Now old Crickety has usurped my throne," said Kit, " I think I'll abdicate—or abscond it, which is it, Trystie ? —and we'll go home. Don't you think I had better whistle a tune on my recorder, and bring the fairies to help us ? "

" Yes, Kit ; but you shall still be king of our side, and get us safely out of your kingdom ; and Lord Curdie shall be your Chief of Staff, and we'll beat a dignified retreat. But first, let's all sit down on the soft grass for a minute and paddle our feet in the jolly water."

Trystie was so happy, so very glad to be just one of the children again, that it seemed at the moment like one of their many games.

"Take care of the sense, Master Kit," said Curdie, as they all sat down by the water-side, "and the sounds will take care of themselves!"

Davie was the only one not quite happy; he could not forget the horrible things they had come through. Trystie held him and Robin close to her, an arm about each of them. The wonderful Ewer, lying on its side at their feet, constantly poured out a little stream of silvery water, which trickled away among the grass and irises to join the merry River. Davie kept looking over his shoulder as if afraid for Miss Duckling's safety. She had remained near them and had not run away with the others. But now it seemed as if, feeling isolated from her own people, she began to doubt the children. She went a little way further down the River and hid herself near one of its bends where the irises and rushes were growing very tall and thick. The poor creature was perhaps nervous again about the Creaky Cart, or the new King, and was already forgetting the River and the children. She felt very sorry for herself and wanted to be alone and be kind to herself. Seeing her afraid and melancholy, Davie began to feel there must be some reason for it; and so, in spite of Trystie's arm and Kit's assurance, he also began to encourage fear.

But Kit piped the little song he loved best, though every time it came differently:

"The Wind she rose up and the Sun he went down,
Down in the deep of the sea,
The Guard closed the doors of the Fairy Town,
But opened a glad dream for me.

"A rooty hand crept behind Kit"

" The night it grew dark and the gusty Wind blew,
The Moon broke away from her shroud ;
A fairy ship sailed out of dreams that were true,
And stood in a harbour of cloud."

He had reached the end of this second verse, when, in at the distant archway, which led to the Garden of Silence, there sailed two noble and full-rigged fairy ships, and more behind them. They shone like sunlight on thistledown ; and, as they came, the River got deeper and broader.

" Look, Davie ! Look, Robin ! " exclaimed Trystie, pointing to the ships ; " they're coming to take us all home to Mother and Father ! "

But at that very moment, when Kit was well into the third verse :

" At dawn the great King rose in flames from his bed,
His bed in the deep of the sea,
The witch on her broom gave a scream as she fled "——

at the very moment, that is, when Trystie was pointing at the ships, and the boys were watching them with eager eyes, and Curdie was taking a short nap, a long rooty hand stealthily crept behind Kit and snatched away the recorder !

Instantly it darkened, the fairy ships foundered, the irises and rushes drooped, and Miss Duckling ran out and away from her shelter, weeping. Trystie quickly rose, picking up Robin in her arms. Kit called Curdie and bade him fly after Crickety, who was racing away in somersault leaps with the recorder under his arm. But, worst of all, Davie was running after Miss Duckling to bring her back to safety. A dense rushing swarm of Pigwidgeons hid the two fugitives and made it impossible either to see or to follow them.

Yells of wicked exultation rose on all sides.

"Shockle that Davie!" shouted King Crickety; "after him, ye nimble Pigs! Snouts! if you don't catch him and let me google him, I'll have the lot of you pickled alive. I tell you his eyes *are* peppermints—guzzly bull's-eyes! Catch him alive—and a taste of 'em for every Pig of you!"

Davie was now running away in blind fear. Trystie snatched up the silver Ewer, which was still pouring out its sparkling water. She filled her hand and threw the water wide, so that it broke into a fine spray and sped away towards Davie. Then Trystie saw in the cloud of spray a little rainbow shining bright and clear, and she knew he would be saved. Kit saw it too, yet he felt afraid—but for Davie, not himself. He raced after the retreating crowd. With fearless blows of fists and feet, he rushed in among them, throwing them down to right and left. Not one of them hit him back. Yet it was hopeless—the crowd was too dense, the numbers too many. Trystie, seeing the uselessness of running after Davie, waited with Robin patiently for the help she knew would come. She led Robin to the top of a little moss-and-fern-clad rock, round which the river ran, and threw more fairy rain over the furious, shouting people. But still Davie ran and the howling horrors after him. Yet it was the rainbow and not the enemy that overtook him.

Just in time—just as Crickety, brandishing the recorder and cheering his followers on with fearful threats and promises, was laying hands upon the child—out of the rainbow leaped in front of Davie—who but Sir Squirrel? For one brief moment he stood by Davie's side with outstretched tail. The child understood at once; he seized the long soft fur and climbed into safety.

Davie does not remember much of what next followed in that race for life, except the frequent words of encouragement from his steed as they rushed round the spiral path in the dome, and right up into the fleecy clouds. "Hold on tight, Davie, for a leap and a fly! Missed that spider's claw by an ace! Now it is smooth running. I've a message from the Queen all for you and Kit, Davie. She said to me, 'Sir Squirrel,' she said, 'tell those two boys they're *good* boys. And tell them I'll bring them all home again.' That's what she said. And Dame Squirrel—But here's the Hole—Hullo! that Pigwidgie got a nasty slap from a spider and fell down such a spank!—and Dame Squirrel has got the guest-room ready for you—Hold on now and let go my tail, Davie!—such a leap that was!—The Squirrillies are making up a new game to play with you. And there's such a lovely supper all ready!"

The Pigwidgeons were still after them in hundreds, hooting and screaming and using the shockingest language. One of them, taking a short cut, had actually got ahead, and was out of the hole before Davie and his friend. Who this one was they did not know till later. Sir Squirrel had come just in time, or Davie had lost his eyes, I suppose. But now, safe on his good friend's back, he was hardly afraid any more.

By this time they were away in the woods again, leaping from tree to tree, alighting on and rushing along swinging boughs, flying up or down the trunks of trees where the leaps would be too great even for this strong and knightly squirrel with a boy on his back. Now and then they would for a minute hide in a hole or under a disused nest, and so let the pursuers pass them. Then they would double, or take a short cut. Thus by speed, by pluck, by clever trick-

ing, they kept well ahead. It was about one o'clock in the morning and silvery dark with a thin thread of the moon above them.

At last, though yells still came pelting about their ears, Sir Squirrel began to slacken his pace and to pant for breath. "Nearly there, Davie boy!" he managed to say. Yet he now ran unsteadily, and his tail trailed behind him so limp that it sometimes even caught in the twigs, once nearly jerking Davie out of his seat. "Ah! just missed him," then cried a voice behind them. "His tail runs slower now than the rest of him, and I've got a handful of its fur!" The patter and leaps got nearer and nearer; the yells sounded like chuckle-boast: "Got 'em at last! Squirrel-pie for supper, mates!—We'll skin the little uns and stuff 'em!"

But now Davie saw ahead of them, quite plainly in the moonlight, the Squirrel's dray. In front, above, and on all sides was a whole lot of friends awaiting them. Dozens of squirrels and birds stood in orderly array. Sir Squirrel leaped on to the last bough, trotted wearily along it to the fork where his home was built. The ranks of the little army opened out and cheered as he came.

"Tumble off, Davie," the good Squirrel said in a last gasp, as he reached the front door. Then he rolled over on his side.

But Dame Squirrel was waiting for him, and had everything ready. Out of a fox-glove bottle she poured down his throat some honey-wine. Then she fanned and brushed him with her loving tail. Soon he sighed deeply, lifted his head and asked if Davie was safe.

"Yes, my own knight," said the lady, fondling his paws; "and we're beating them finely. Such a fusillade of stones

and nut-shells they've got! They don't seem to mind much, and are mad to get the boy's eyes. The dormice are wide-awake and fighting like troopers. The Finch Company are going for the Pigwidgeons' eyes and picking them out like fun. O dear! there's Major Blackbird on foot and fighting three at once, sticking them like snicker-snack with his yellow rapier: but, O goodness-gracious! he's getting the worst of it!"

"Blackbird getting the worst of it? Then I'm all right again!" And up jumped Sir Squirrel and sprang with a limp into the middle of the fray. *Davie ran after him.* Both were at once in the thick of it. Davie said somehow he was no longer afraid. He seized one Pigwidgeon after another by the throat and strangled three.

That was the turning point in the battle. But Davie remembers no more till he found the four young squirrels had taken possession of him, and had put him to bed in the guest-room. They gave him a drink of nut-milk and a slice of cake made of barley, honey and almonds, and baked in a sun-oven. He found his right arm was aching; it was tied up in a sling of woven thistledown. Then he heard it begin to rain in torrents; but he was so weary that he fell fast asleep. Never again was he afraid of being googled.

Presently Dame Squirrel came in to see if his arm was all right. He woke and found the pain was gone. He asked if the battle was over.

"Yes," she said proudly; "Sir Squirrel and you, brave boy, turned the scale. He's the bravest and noblest knight in all the world, you know; and you saved him by killing those three coward-beasts. Then when they were all beaten,

the rain came and washed away all that was left of them. They hate the rain. But I've got something grand to tell you, Davie : the Queen has promised you the Fairy Cross and a Commission ! Isn't that fine ? So go to sleep again, *Captain* Davie. Sir Squirrel wants me."

CHAPTER XXI

Crickety is no Sportsman and Kit knocks him down—Kit is too trustful and pays the Penalty—Trystic's Heroism and great Danger—Arrival of the Leprecaun—The Duel.

IT was a comparatively small number of the Pigwidgeons after all that went after Davie on his squirrel's back. Thousands remained in the Hole. Nor were many of them killed in the battle in the tree-top ; they were hardly the sort to take heavy risks, even with the hope of squirrel-pie and peppermints to give them courage. Some were blinded by the finches, others were killed by Major Blackbird's rapier, two at least by Sir Squirrel and three by Davie—now a Captain, with the right to wear the Fairy Cross, and to write *F.C.* after his name. The blinded creatures fell with the dead ones to the ground, and those that were not killed by the fall were drowned by the rain. In the morning the only signs of the terrible execution done in the night were the sodden and broken roots of all kinds that littered the woodland carpet. Passers-by would have been puzzled to know how bits of turnips, potatoes, swedes, parsnips, horse-radish, salsify, and so on, had come there. I found them myself some days later, and so, of course, can vouch for the accuracy of Davie's report of the battle.

But many of the defeated Pigwidgeons found their way back to their Hole, bedraggled, soaking wet, and with all

the fight washed out of them. Not only had the River come into their country, but now the rain had got into themselves. When they reached home they would not join with the others, but sat or walked apart, conscious of disgrace. Curiously, they now always fed two together and often pressed their tit-bits upon each other. The others looked upon them as lunatics, hated and maltreated them more than was customary, and hoped the Creaky Cart would soon fetch them away.

But during Davie's flight and the subsequent battle in the tree-top, things were going badly with his sister and brothers.

It is impossible to account for Crickety's acquiring the ability to rule his people and direct proceedings. But these he did certainly with some skill, just as he had succeeded in robbing Kit of his recorder. In the darkness that followed the theft, the usurper got together an army of which Kit had known nothing. It was composed of the pig-monkey-like people, but rooty; and they were well drilled into a sort of regimental submission. These came marching up in companies and formed a wide crescent, bounded by the river. King Crickety strutted in the centre, and was armed with a straight sword and buckler. The soldiers continued to arrive, until the crescent contained a thousand men armed to the teeth—and mostly with teeth, long, sharp, and bitter. For a wide space the soldiers kept free of the River bank, as if afraid of it. The River itself, since the fairy ships had foundered, had grown much wider. When Trystie looked for a moment across it, she saw through a faint haze a lovely country looking very like Downland; and not very far away she was quite sure she saw her Godmother's castle. She longed to go back into the River

again ; but this she knew she must not do, because Kit could not yet come with her ; because Davie was she knew not where ; and because she could not leave Miss Duckling till she also was safe.

Kit boldly stepped forwards to the King. "Look here, old Crickety," he said, not boastfully, though a little contemptuously—and rightly so ; "look here, you're welcome to the throne, and be hanged to the lot of you ! The throne for one, a long rope for all ! But that recorder is mine. Jonas gave it to me for my own. If you don't give it back, I do believe the Creaky Cart will make you !"

"It's rummy funny, Kit," replied the King, speaking more familiarly than ever before, "that I don't have you strung up like a lantern, you young ape. But since you made Lord Curdie give me back the piece he bit out, and since that shocking River came, I want to be kind. All the same, I shan't give you back the recorder, because you'll blow it, and then the Creaky Cart *will* come. Besides, it's put where it ought to be—in the Museum of Woes. We needed it to make our collection of superstitions quite the finest in the world."

Then Kit, Trystie tells us, spoke up like a man and without any boastfulness ; "Crickety," he said, "I shall kill you."

"He ! he !" jeered the ungainly little monster, striking a theatrical attitude with his sword and shield, "the deader a Pigwidgeon gets, the harder it is to kill him ! So kill away, my buck !"

Kit rushed at Crickety and with one blow at his head knocked him over. Kit could then have seized his sword and killed him, had he been so minded ; but he would not strike even a Pigwidgeon that was down. The King lay

still, shamming dead. His bodyguard seized Kit. Then they picked Crickety up, ran the skewer up through the seat of the throne and jammed him upon it to keep him in his place. Then they gave him his sword and shield.

"Fetch Lord Curdie to pull it out!" yelled Crickety, "and you shall have the recorder, I swear, Master Kit!"

Kit, though his arms were by this time tightly bound to his sides and his legs together, thought Crickety was easier to deal with than the soldiers, and might possibly keep his word. So he called Curdie, who had been flying at and biting the bodyguard for all he was worth, and bade him pull the skewer out. The dog obeyed, and Crickety stepped down from the throne.

"There's no room for fools in Galleybird's Hole," said the King with a loud sneer; "take him to the spiders to hang!"

The guard marched Kit away. Then Trystie unfortunately forgot her Godmother's warning and left the Magic Ewer on the River bank. With Robin in her arms, she hurriedly pushed through the crowd and stood before Crickety. She was too proud a girl to show fear or tears to such a creature. She just quietly asked if there was nothing she could do to save Kit. Crickety took no notice, but bade the soldiers bind her and Robin also.

The King climbed on to his throne again and ordered the guard to bring Trystie to him. This done he bade the men retire. Then, hissing between his loose teeth, he told Trystie that he had them all safely bound; that Davie was devoured by wild birds; and that he would have Kit's and Robin's eyes out. He stopped to take breath and a turn with his bull's-eye, which had got jammed. He put

his long finger into his mouth to unfix it, and then pointed at Trystie.

"And what are *you* doing here, minx?" he asked.

"I came to rescue Kit and find the Iron Chest where the choose-keys are kept."

"You'll never do neither," said Crickety. He was seldom grammatical. "There's no such thing as choose-keys. Perhaps you've got one of your own?"

"Of course I have, or I should be a Pigwidgeon by this time," replied Trystie, who at that moment felt quite certain the children who had had their keys stolen must have grown into these Pigwidgeons.

"Then give it to me!" exclaimed Crickety in such sudden and terrible excitement that the bull's-eye fell out. He picked it up, wiped it on the gold fringe of the cushion he sat upon, and put it in his mouth again; "give it me, you little she-liar, give it me! and I swear you shall all go free. I'll set you free first, if you promise. Give it me!"

Choose-keys can never be taken away by force when once their possessors know about them. They can only be given. So Crickety had to beg for Trystie's. What he wanted it for will never be known.

But Trystie remembered how her Godmother had warned her when, three years before, she recovered her own key in Goblin Town, never to part with it—not even to save her own or any other body's life.

"I mustn't do that," she answered firmly, but turning very pale; "because the choose-keys all belong to my Godmother, the Queen; besides, it is in my heart now."

"That's a lie, you she-girl," interrupted the King. "You haven't got a heart; nor a Godmother. There ain't no Queen. They're all superstitions and don't count."

"I don't know whether you are very stupid or very ignorant," said Trystie severely, and now trembling all over, "and it does not much matter, because I won't give you my key even to save my brothers. I would not if I could. But you may have my eyes, if that will save theirs."

The moment she said this, Crickety leaped upon her and seized her face in his hands with such force and quickness that she fell under him. Robin then began to cry despairingly; but the bodyguard closed in upon them, and Trystie could hardly speak one word to comfort him. Curdie was nowhere to be seen.

Meantime very important events were taking place of which neither Crickety nor his bodyguard could know. Trystie too did not know, because her whole attention was taken up with Robin and the King and her determination to give her own eyes if they would save the boys'.

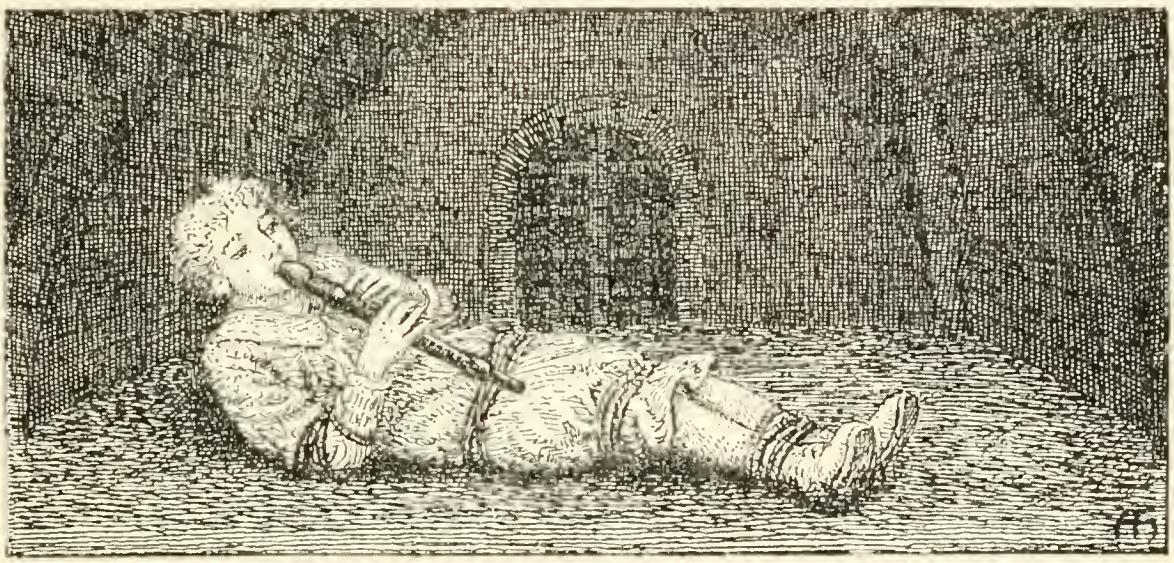
To explain what followed, we must go back a little bit.

Because an army is well drilled, it does not follow that even its officers are clever people. The Pigwidgeon guards who marched Kit away were but a pack of stupids. They had some idea, however, that Kit and his friends were different from themselves. As they marched the boy along, they came to the conclusion that, as he was not quite ordinary, he must be a *specimen* and, after he was googled, must be stuffed. "In that case," said the corporal, "we'd better take him to the museum and put him into the Torture Dungeon, where they do the skinning and stuffing. He'll be a lovely woe with nice glass eyes and a bushy tail! None of *them* ever escapes with his life—and very few without it. He'll be quite safe there."

So, as good fortune had it—or, I wonder, was it some secret emissary from the Queen that suggested it to the

corporal?—Kit was thrust and locked into the Museum of Woes. Though it was almost pitch dark, there of course he found lying on the floor, its black shiny surface reflecting a little light from somewhere or other, his cherished recorder. The stupid corporal had either forgotten all about it, or was ignorant of its magic when played upon by its master. Kit picked it up and began to play.

The most wonderful music then poured out of its happy throat—music like a band of Christian birds marching, or



rather winging, to a glorious fight—glorious, because they knew they would win the day for their Queen and their nests and their chicks and their summer days of blue skies and quiet rains; glorious, because they also knew that these could be saved only by giving their own lives. Kit will remember it all his life long, I think. He calls it *The March of the Birds*. The words of it shall be put at the end of this chapter so as not to delay telling how things went. But the words are little without the music: it was as martial as bagpipes on the hills, as thrilling as blackbirds' carols to the sun.

The music sped away directly, out from the dungeon into the Hole, out from the Hole and away into the wide world. It filled all the country around as well as the children's hearts. It reached Crickety's ears at the very moment when he seized Trystie's face in his rooty hands; and he pulled them away as if something invisible had struck him in the face. Trystie says that, as soon as she heard it, something seemed to shine so brightly everywhere that all the ugliness got transparent and weak; it made her feel, although painfully bound, no longer afraid. Robin stopped crying and watched his air-ball rise and pull upon its string. The guards fell back and left them space to breathe. Crickety got upon his feet, set his right foot upon Trystie's chest and his fingers in his ears. He stopped chewing; he shivered; his red buttons turned pale; his teeth chattered and many fell out. But he put all his weight upon his right foot, so that Trystie could hardly breathe and found it impossible to move, beyond turning her head a little. Somehow the music was so entrancingly full of courage and love and faith that nothing else now seemed to be of much importance. She could gladly part with her eyes for Kit's sake; gladly indeed, though she would never more see him—nor Mother, Father, Davie, Robin, Honeypot, and the darling twins; never more behold the birds and the Downs and Curdie; nor the thistledown Fairy Fleet, nor her Godmother, nor her dearest Captain Leprecaun.

Kit piped away merrily in the Dungeon of Woes.

Trystie turned her head to the River. She could see it for a mile or more, now that the guard had left a little space about her. She could see the waves dancing upon it, and on its banks the yellow flags waving in the breeze that

was blowing up its course. The haze beyond was clearing. The Queen's Castle shone radiantly in the sun, and its flags never ceased streaming, though all the time changing into birds that sped away with orders from the Queen.

Slowly up, slowly up, surely nearer and nearer, sailed the Fairy Fleet; and the River was wide enough for all. Leading them was the noblest full-rigged ship Trystie had seen. When close to where she lay with that villain foot upon her chest, the wind dropped. With magic speed the sails were furled, and the captain's gig launched. Fairy sailors leaped into it and rowed to the River's bank. Then there sprang ashore Captain Leprecaun. Trystie knew she was saved.

Still Kit piped away in the Dungeon.

"Trystie, Princess," cried the Leprecaun, "it's meself, the little cobbler; at your service with me rapier."

He stood there looking, for all his small stature, so loving and fierce, so gaily dressed in his shining green and his red hood, his rapier hanging at his side with glittering silver hilt and white shagreen scabbard, and his sword-belt shining like running water, that Trystie's heart got very full of happiness.

Crickety took his foot off Trystie and stepped back. Somehow his cowardice had all left him—whether because of the intensity of his greed, or because the influence of River and music was actually awakening some good quality in him—even if only that of brute-fight—it is impossible to say. But he drew and flourished his short sword, prepared to contest to the death his rights in Trystie's eyes.

Now you might think that the fight would soon be over and that Crickety, with his heavy hacking sword and round little buckler, would be no match for the Captain's long

cut-and-thrust rapier. For this was a magic blade from Toledo itself. Some say that it used to hang up alongside of Kit's recorder in Shakespeare's parlour. More likely it is that Vincenzio Saviolo, who taught Shakespeare all he knew about fencing, taught the noble Leprecaun also, and made of him a match for any man or blade of like metal. But his enemy now was a handful—as all swashbucklers are—not because of his sword or his weight—not even because of his lucky peppermint !—but solely because of his crass ignorance and unblemished stupidity. These are summed up by one word in Fairy language and are called *selfishness*. It is the most terrible enemy of the Queen's ; it takes all her ingenuity, patience, strength—yes, and suffering—to overcome. Little wonder, then, that Trystie's Captain had his work cut out for him, before he could cut it up.

"He ! He !" roared Crickety, banging together his sword and buckler and dancing like a play-actor.

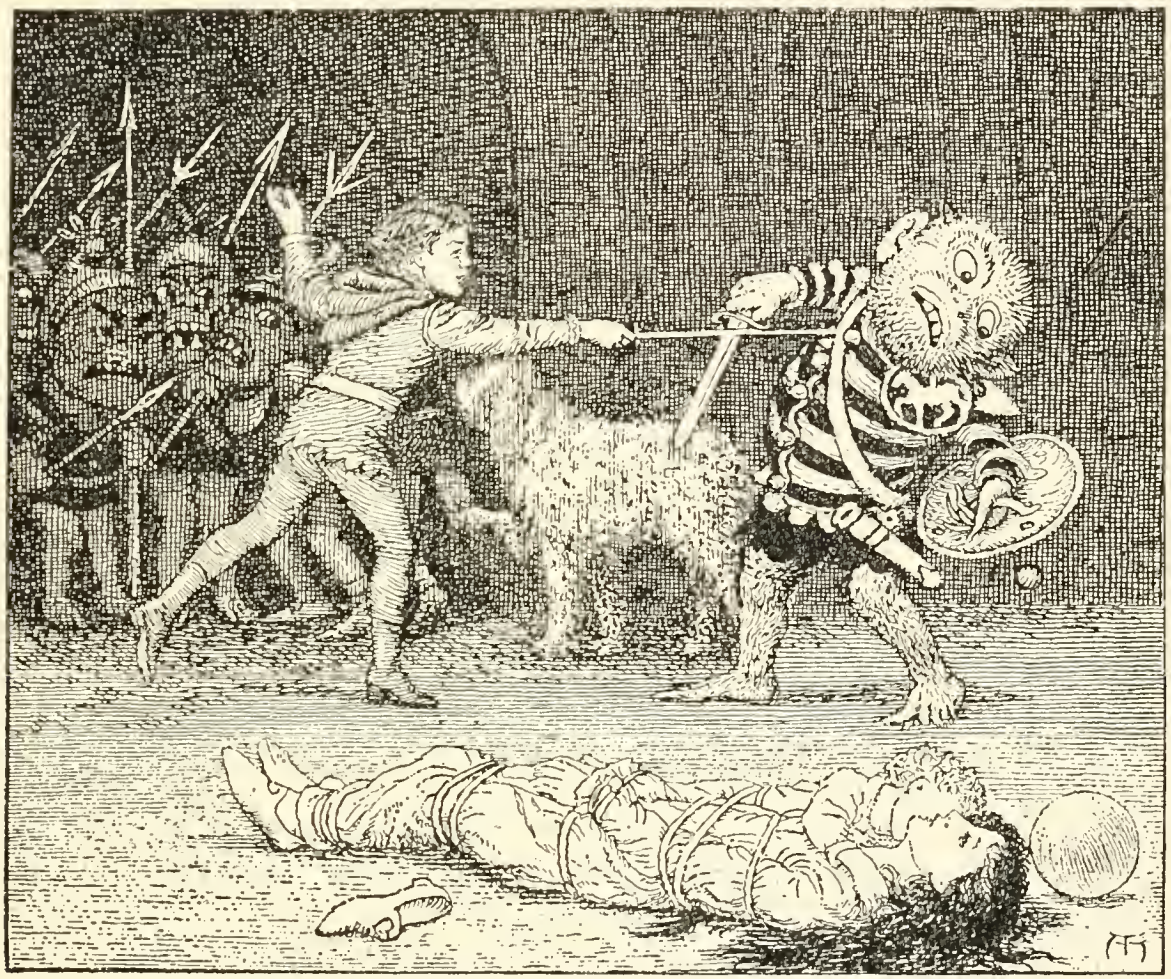
"Ha ! Ha !" sang out the Captain, as he drew his rapier, stamped his foot and lunged within an ace of the heart his enemy had not got.

At this moment Curdie came running back quite breathless. He had, they supposed, gone after Kit and had been trying to get into the dungeon. Now there was other work for him. He saw in a moment what was a-doing, and knew he must keep the King's bodyguard at bay while the duel proceeded. Curdie was every inch a sportsman and meant to see fair play.

Kit's music still filled the air with thrilling strains.

Crickety parried the thrust just as the blade was withdrawn—a manœuvre puzzling enough to any but an Irishman. Crickety fiercely slashed to right and left, mixing up

sword and buckler in the most absurd way. The Leprecaun, thanks to his matchless dexterity, escaped damage by use of the *incortata* or vault aside, by the *passado* and other accredited feats. He was full of "secret foynes," as he



would have termed his tricks of hand and wrist—all justifiable and necessary to disarm a solid fool.

"How supple and quick that hard little hand must be," thought Trystie, amidst hope, fear, and excitement; "—in spite of the cobbler's wax!"

At last by a *rinverso tondo*—a twist of the rapier's point—the brave Captain whipped out one of Crickety's eyes;

and, while the creature dealt a slashing blow that would have felled a lion, the Captain dodged, lunged, and recovered, only to deliver a downward cut from the right with the point of his weapon—a *stromazone* in rapier language—which laid open Crickety's cheek and allowed the lucky bull's-eye to drop upon the ground.

Then Crickety, forgetting his danger, tried, before any of his bodyguard could grab it, to catch in his buckler the sticky sweet as it rolled away ; but he lost his footing and fell.

The bodyguard then fled. Curdie, now less sportsmanlike, I fear, came and stood with his fore paws on Crickety's breastplate, showing his teeth and growling fearfully. The Pigwidgeon King again shammed dead. The victorious Captain cut the bonds that tied Trystie and Robin.

Still Kit piped away in the Dungeon of Woes ; and this was the song sung by the recorder :

" *Now in the dawn is the pibroch heard*
With urlar and warblers and trill :
Black is the wing of the piper bird,
His melody martial and shrill.[1]

" March and rise on chivalrous wing !
Birds will all muster to-day
To clear the grim ramparts of cloud from the sky,
And make for the rainbow a way.
March and rise on chivalrous wing !
Soldiers and fairies are we,
Wings are our ladders to scale walls on high,
Hope is the maid we must free !

[1] Every blackbird is a piper. His lungs are the bag ; his windpipe carries the fipple (or whistle) ; while every bone in his body is hollow and communicates with his lungs. The only difference between the bagpipes and the bird is that a Highlander has to put his soul into the music, while the blackbird's soul is ready there. The *pibroch* is the special music of the bagpipes, used either as a dirge or a song of battle and victory, particularly the latter. The *urlar* is the all-pervading melody, to which the piper adds warblers and trills to excite the martial spirit in his hearers.

" Now in the dawn is the pibroch heard
With urlar and warblers and trill :
Strong in his wind is the piper bird,
Yellow and sweet is his bill !

" March and rise on chivalrous wing !
Keen are our courage and beak :
Arms win the day when love yields her might,
And glory gives strength to the weak.
March and rise on chivalrous wing !
Rushing aloft to obey,
With pibroch and song to encourage the right,
And die for our Queen any day !

" Now in the dawn is the pibroch heard
With urlar and warblers and trill :
Black is the wing of the piper bird,
Rosy the morning and still."

CHAPTER XXII

The Leprecaun explains and sails away with Trystie and Robin—
A Fairy Breakfast on Board Ship.

CRICKETY lay still. He had lost the day, the peppermint, and, besides one of his own eyes, all chance of getting Trystie's. Some of his bodyguard returned; they stuck the skewer through the throne again, set the wounded King upon it and carried it bodily away. Trystie, Davie and the brave Captain were left alone. Curdie had disappeared—gone to find Kit again, most probably.

His work done, the Leprecaun took off his sword-belt, and laid the rapier in its sheath beside the silver Ewer, which was still pouring out its little stream. The belt ran away and joined with the other rivulet, so that the water-music now sounded like two singing together. Trystie was holding Robin by the hand again. The Captain then knelt before her, on his two knees, as would a humble cobbler; not on one, as might a victorious duellist or a magician who made waters to run or bubble or sing at his bidding. He threw back his hood and lifted my little girl's hand to his lips. I am quite sure her bright face grew very rosy, because the reverential caress made her feel so proud and happy. Then the Captain looked up into her eyes.

"Where's Kit, Captain dear?" she asked. "Can you take us to him? I heard his recorder singing and singing

and it brought you to me. We must find him at once, for the music is getting faint and further away."

The Leprecaun rose. Trystie stooped to pick up her Ewer; but her hand went only into a pool of silvery water.

"It's not the Ewer ye'll be wanting now," said the Captain, "for ye're right in the River again, Princess, and the River is in you. It will take ye straight to Kit by its own windings. A big task it is that's before ye; and it's spare ye I would, could it be done. Will ye trust me to show ye the quickest way?"

"Of course I will, Captain. I couldn't *not* trust you if I tried"; answered Trystie. "Kit's all right with his recorder, I'm sure. But it's Davie I'm so anxious about now."

"He's safe with one of me best friends, though up a tree," replied the Captain as he led the children to his own boat, in which the sailors were waiting and resting on their oars all ready. He helped them into the stern, and they were quickly rowed to the fairy ship. When they were on board, Trystie found it was, after all, but a little ship, though big enough to carry them along swiftly and safely. Nothing in Fairyland, or on the fairy River, is any bigger than it need be—which is perhaps the reason why so few people believe in fairies. The anchor was weighed and the sails set, all to rollicking little sailor songs. Slowly they sailed away down the wide river. The Captain took the children to the bows. They leaned over the gunwale and looked into the wonderful water, where the happy silver fishes took up the refrains of the sailors' songs and saluted, as they passed, by saucily splashing their nimble tails just out of water. Beyond the gentle wash, wash, and lap of the water, with which the singing kept perfect time, the world was all silent about

them. The enemy had fled or vanished. Had the birds won the day? Robin was still happy with his air-ball and holding his sister's hand. He spoke hardly one word all the time he was in Fairyland.

"What does it all mean, Captain?" asked Trystie,

after a long silence filled with wonders. "Do things mean the same here as at home?"

"Out of Fairyland," he replied, looking very sad, Trystie thought, "everybody tries his hardest to mean nothing at all at all."

"O, but I think you must be wrong there, Captain. My father and mother mean heaps and heaps more than they ever say."

"Then it's quite right ye must be, Trystie mavourneen,"

eagerly replied the little man, " if ye be telling of your own belongings : *they* will never be so thick in the instep as the cobbler measures them ! Yet it's small differ. What they think they mean, they never mean."

Trystie drew herself up a little, and said perhaps a little severely, " I *don't* understand."

" And it's meself will explain to ye, Princess," replied the Captain in his softest voice, and his eyes shining again as they shone when he leapt out of the boat. " Ye see, there's never a meaning—not in the birds nor the flowers nor the thistledown nor the foam of the storm—without the creature's a fairy. And not even one fairy among them all can mean what he is, without he's at home in more than one place at a time."

" Then are you somewhere else now ? " asked Trystie, puzzled as to what he could mean.

" Truth then, ye catch me out," replied the fairy cobbler, laughing for a moment and yet with a fresh touch of sadness in his rippling speech, and falling for once into his richest brogue ; " for niver, that I can recall, was I so intoirely in one and the same place at the same toime as am I now ! "

" Why ! where are you then, Captain dear ? " asked the girl, as though for a moment he were a child and she must be careful to understand him.

" O where, indade," he answered with strange and tremulous intensity, " if it be not in the one place in the whole world where 'tis unpossible for a mannikin cobbler to reach—Captain of a Flag Ship though he be—your own big heart, little woman ? "

He said this so simply and directly that Trystie could not know he was speaking out of deep places

in his own heart that he had perhaps never dreamed of before. The wind had freshened, and the Captain turned to go aft, but quickly came back to say another word :

" When a fairy-man names ye for a ' little woman,' 'tis more than princess or fairy," he said very earnestly, " so 'tis scorn ye will not be putting upon a Leprecaun, who—? "

But he turned away without finishing his question. In a moment or two, however, he came back and said :

" Princess, there is just one place in the world where man or fairy must find every bit of himself, if he would be there at all at all. But the fairy-man never gets there, because he can*not* be there and not in Fairyland too, do whatever he will. Princess, 'twas the cobbler himself that made and kissed the fairy shoon that are motherin' your little feet. 'Tis Captain Leprecaun will be content to nurse the scald-heart he has got for his pains."

Then the little green-coated man went and said a word to the quartermaster at the helm. He came forwards again, but stood apart from the children, leaning on the capstan and looking away into the distant land as he sang, in his sweet bird-like voice :

" If shepherd bold a fairy fawn
Would charm, or maiden woo,
He plays his pipe at early dawn
'Midst ponds of fairy dew :
If fawn be coy, or maiden sad,
He calls his merry crew
Of sheep and lambs, all gaily clad
In bells and ribbons blue.

"The plough may stand, the sheep may stray :
All count for nought, I ween,
When Colin's art in blithesome May
Would crown his Cynthia queen.
Some stand and wait, or cobble shoes,
Some dance in moonlit sheen,
Some softly weep for what they lose,
And hide the things they mean."

Trystie never quite understood what the little man meant till years afterwards. At present she wondered how it could be that her brave champion, who had saved her life and Robin's, should be so sad as to make her feel she must throw her arms about him to comfort him. She did not do this, however, just because he was behind her.

By this time Galleybird's Hole was far away. Presently the Captain, quite cheerful again, came up to the children, and told Trystie she would soon be at the bottom of the sea, where the Iron Chest had been left by the goblins. He told her the story, much of which she already knew, of how I and Curdie had fought the huge cuttle-fish, the protectors of Goblin Town; how, one by one, all the grown-up people had died of a kind of plague which the Pigwidgeons call *Shockle-pox;* and how the children, not being old enough to take it badly, had got better and wandered away. He told her how they would have grown up into goblins, since they had lost their choose-keys, but for one thing. Having no power of choosing between right and wrong—since they had no keys to unlock this gift with which every baby is endowed by good fairies at its birth—and being no longer controlled by the iron laws of Goblin City, they ran away all together, and found shelter in Galleybird's Hole. There they became wickeder than even their goblin-parents had

been. Stupid laws, he said, were better than having nothing at all either to love or obey. He told her also how they would never have been found or seen by mortal eye if Kit had not made new bodies for a few of them and called their poor souls into these bodies by whistling screechy tunes out of his pipe. After that, the whole lot of them became visible and their power for harm became active.

"What a pity," said Trystie, "that Kit ever made his pipe."

"Nor pity is it either," answered her protector; "for without Kit's patient piping in the barn, you would never have found the little cobbler man—it's a better servant he will be to his Queen for your sweet sake, Princess!—nor yet the Iron Chest; nor could ye ever have saved the Pigwidgeons."

"O, indeed, I *am* glad you came to me, Captain dear," said Trystie; "but I'm afraid I don't care to save the Pigwidgeons now. I only want Kit and Davie and all to go home—and, and—you'll come and live with us, won't you, Captain?"

But the Captain said only one thing to her, looking up into her eyes, with something, she says, of her Godmother shining in his face:

"Trystie, my child, have you then forgotten the children in Goblin Town and what the keys will do for them?"

"Captain, Captain, O, I'm a bad child!" then exclaimed Trystie with instant understanding. "Take us quickly to my Godmother and Kit, and fetch Davie back to us! Then we'll all go and find the Iron Chest!"

Whereupon the Captain took them aft into the cabin and gave them breakfast—fairy wheaten cakes, honey, snowberry jam, and the very cream of the dew to drink.

CHAPTER XXIII

Kit is at last shockled and Trystie is very brave—Kit is adopted—
The Great Fire promises a better Beginning.

THAT drink of fairy dew did much to encourage them for what followed. Trystie at least needed every bit of strength that her heart could hold. I dare not let myself think what might have happened but for her fortitude.

Breakfast over, the Captain brought the two children on deck again, and they found the ship at anchor in the moat of the Queen's Castle. They got into the gig which was lowered and manned once more; and they were rowed under a little archway through which the water ran merrily into the Fairy Garden.

Trystie's Godmother was waiting for them. She held her child's hair back with both her hands and kissed her tenderly —on both eyes, on her forehead, and on her mouth. Then she lifted Robin into her arms, kissed him also and set him down again, while he still held the string of his air-ball. She called two sheep-dog pups, two kittens and two yellow-beaked blackbirds in green jackets, and set them all romping. In a minute the child was laughing and clapping his hands; the puppies were barking and the kittens leaping at the air-ball; the birds were singing nursery rhymes. But to Trystie the Queen spoke in words very serious and tender:

"Trystie," she said, "there is no time to lose. If you are brave, you will not be too late. Greater things are yet to be done by you, if our Kit is to be saved. The Captain will not be far from your side. My River can never leave you; and I shall always be where you need me most."

She led her across the garden, straight to a very low archway, under which the deep water was running away. Trystie remembers still hearing Robin's glee and the blackbirds' singing.

"Under there you may go, darling Child," the Queen said, "into the bottom of the sea. The Iron Chest *must* be found if you would save Kit."

"Yes, Godmother," answered Trystie, without any doubting. For one moment she flung her arms round the Queen and buried her face in her bosom. The Queen kissed her once more and thrust her lovingly from her. The child jumped into the stream, sank into the water and was carried away into the deeps of the sea.

She stood alone in a long street of tumble-down whelk shells for houses, with doors and windows gaping and stairways within. Sea-plants were growing up the stairs and out at the windows and waving above in great masses, so that the deserted city was very dark. Great crabs, decked out in rags of gaudy goblin-clothes, crawled about sideways, but did not molest her. Something within carried her along; but everything was so much changed since she had fled from the place two years before that she could not find her way.

Came racing to her out of a huge shell-house, Curdie! He stood up as high as possible, very gaunt and shaggy; he put his paws upon Trystie's shoulders and she kissed his head.

"Quick, quick, Miss Trystie!" he said, "KIT'S SHOCKLED!! Unless you get there in time, he'll——!"

"Where is the Iron Chest, Curdie?" she asked. "Godmother says I *must* get that first."

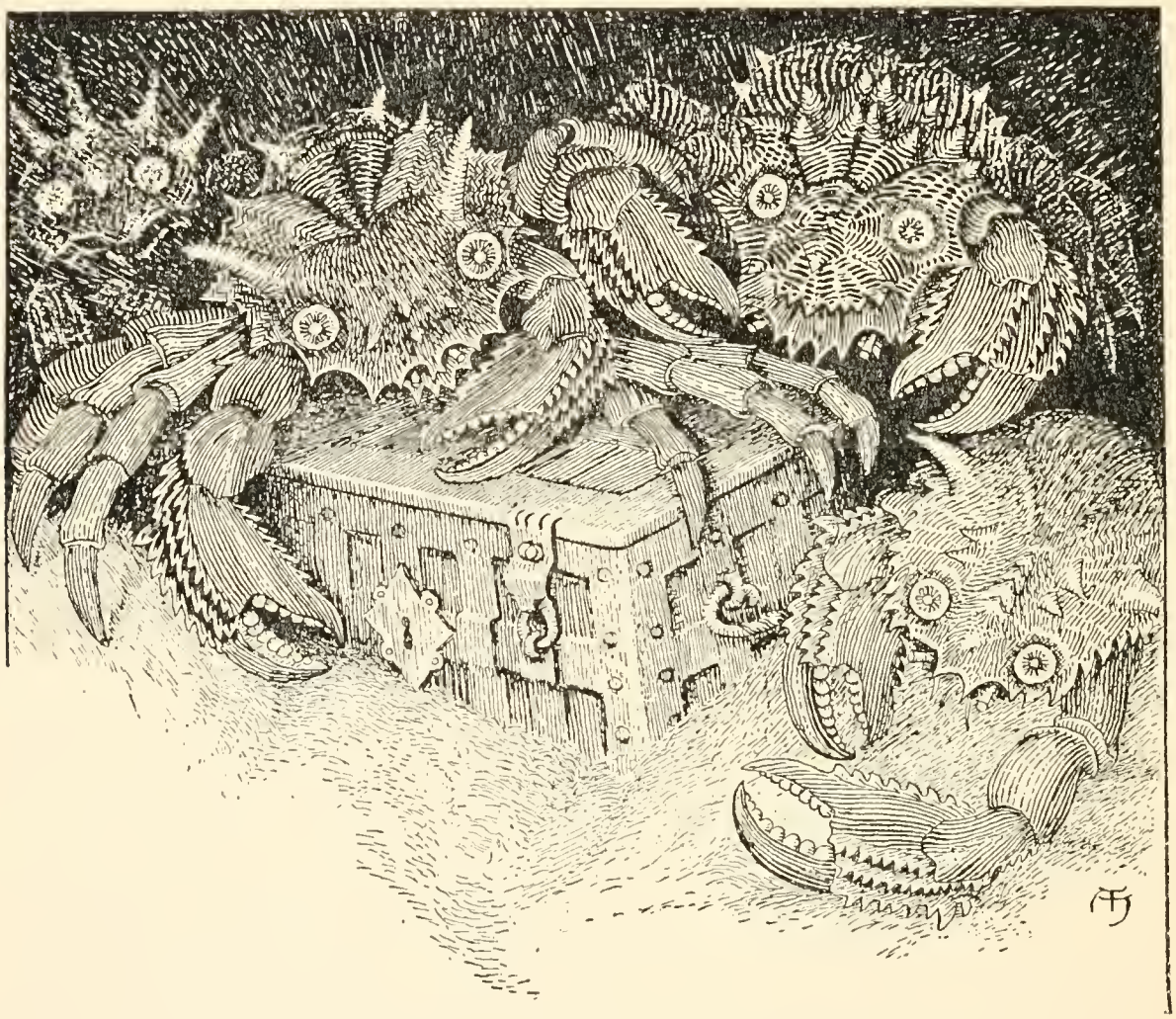
Curdie ran ahead and Trystie followed through intricate ways and streets. The dog kept on muttering, "Waste of time—the keys could wait, *I* should think—the Queen must be right, I suppose—perhaps she doesn't know all the danger—Hurry along! Hurry! Hurry, Miss Trystie!"

The difficulty was the crabs—always in the way—always afraid of being hurt—their very efforts at getting out of the way making them, because they couldn't go straight, more than ever obstructive. But Curdie knew what he was about and did what he was told, though he felt angry at the delay. "If you loved Kit," he said crossly, but only half meaning it, "you would leave the keys till to-morrow and come with me straight. Do you know, Miss, *they've plugged up the recorder!* He's nearly dead."

"O, Curdie, don't hurt me," piteously said Trystie; "but help me! We *must* obey the Queen because she knows everything. She loves Kit better, I think, than even you and I do."

Then they went into a dark cave. Even the light in Curdie's eyes was enough to see by; but, as I am told, Trystie's whole person shone like an angel's. The place was full of awful old crabs guarding the Iron Chest. Curdie seized one after the other, cracking their claws and throwing them out of the cave. It was a large chest, half buried in the sand. From underneath crawled huge black eels with two rows of suckers on the under part of them. Curdie gave each an awful bite and they all shrivelled up, dead. Trystie recognized them as the tentacles of the monster

squids which used to defend the city: they had wriggled away when I lopped them off. Then she laid hold of one handle of the Chest and tugged at it. It yielded and she



dragged it along in spite of its weight, while Curdie pushed behind. The crabs, dull greeny blue and spotted with red, snapped their biting claws in her face and glared at her with their stalky black eyes, but dared not touch her. Once out of the cave, the Chest became lighter and they dragged it along more easily.

Curdie still grumbled though he worked so hard. "If

the Queen loved him better than I do," he said, the hair of his head so unkempt that it almost hid his eyes, "she would know better than to waste time over such a chest as this is! It's almost impossible!"

"Curdie, dog," answered Trystie, looking back at him happily, because she understood, from the weight getting so quickly less and less, that they were doing the only right thing and would therefore be in time; "Curdie dog, when the Queen has said a thing must be done, it's not only possible to do it, but it's the only thing to do. And you know that as well as I do. You want a bone or two, doggie!"

Curdie showed that he understood Trystie's playful encouragement by a little wag of his hind quarters and one short sharp bark. Trystie now found she was actually and easily carrying the Iron Chest in one hand. The dog went into the doorway of a huge shell-building that seemed to be all stair inside. Up and up they ran and the tiny keys chinked almost merrily in the Iron Chest. They came out at the top into a waste place laid out like a garden, but with the flowers all dead. They ran again, and saw before them two great pearl gates set in tumble-down walls; and behind the gates were sounds of roaring. The air seemed very warm; and by the time they reached the gates, it was hotter than any summer day. They heard a great crackling sound like monster faggots burning; and over the tops of the gates they presently saw huge tongues of red and yellow flame with myriads of comet-like sparks rushing into the dark blue sky above. Curdie set up that sharp incisive bark which he always uses when he wants a door opened to let him in. The only response was a noise of howls and laughter. Curdie leapt at the gates in fury. They fell

down into the flames, which rushed out at the gates terrifically. But Curdie jumped back in time.

"That can't be the way, Curdie," said Trystie, her face now white enough.

"It was the way I came out, and must be the way we go in," said Curdie, almost savagely; "if you'd only taken my advice, Miss Trystie, we might have been in time."

"If that's the way, we *are* in time," was Trystie's only answer.

Then before her in the heart of the roaring flames she saw clearly a little rainbow-window. Through it she could see, beyond the flames, an open space. It was full of Pig-widgeons, dancing hideously, fighting fearfully, howling and laughing, round the King's throne. On the throne sat Kit, his head between his knees and his hands clasped above, as if closing tightly ears and eyes. His smock was in rags and his shoes were in gaping holes; but he held his recorder tightly under his arm. The horrible little monsters were pushing the throne slowly backwards as if to thrust it away into the flaming furnace behind. Then the flames came together and hid them all, though the rainbow still shone.

Curdie stood up in front of Trystie, put his paws on her shoulders and said simply:

"Not you, Miss—my turn first."

"No, Curdie, you must let me go at once, or we shall lose Kit and Faith and Godmother and all."

Then she put her face into her hands and said under her breath, "O, the heat is awful, Godmother, and I am afraid!"

At that very moment she heard a splashing and scamper of water, and there stood by her side the Leprecaun.

"Come, Princess!" he said. "Quick! Quick!"

He pulled his belt off, and waved it aloft for one moment. Its flash of green and white light was so vivid that the flames seemed to lose their fierceness. Then with a twist of his wrist, the belt lashed round Trystie's waist and the free end flew round Curdie's neck. The buckle part the Captain still held.

Straight into the flames, straight through the rainbow's seven sacred colours, the three went together. Not a hair of head or body was singed. They stood in a place of hot sand where the Pigwidgeons were howling around Kit's throne.

In a moment the Leprecaun's belt of living water which no fire could harm was released. Again the Captain Cobbler swung it three times round his head with such wild vigour that the rain fell in torrents upon that swarm of wicked Pigwidgeons. It damped their sins, their hate, and their exultations, so that one by one they rolled over and lay still upon their sides or backs. Yet they tried to hide behind one another as if from something they feared. Curdie cleared a path through them, and Trystie saw soft green grass already beginning to grow. She ran up to the throne and called Kit by name, throwing her arms about him. He looked up, but could hardly believe it when he saw her whom he loved best after his mother; he staggered to his feet and just fell into his sister's arms, quite unconscious. Then came the Leprecaun. He took off the boy's shoes, one with its sole torn right off, and sat down before the sister and brother. Out of one pocket came awl, lapstone and hammer, out of another bristles and thread and wax. With his knife he cut pieces from his own leather jerkin and began to cobble the shoes. Every

time he pulled tight his threads, he would look up at Trystie. The silver belt lay at his feet and ran away singing. It made an icy cold brook round the three, bidding irises and meadow-sweet to grow, and then ran away, ever widening as it disappeared among the roaring mountains of flame.

Trystie had taken Kit's head in her lap. How thin and white he was! She dipped her hand into the cold water, gave him to drink and bathed his face. He opened his eyes for one moment and Trystie saw they were unharmed. He was soon breathing quietly as if fast asleep. Then she reached out to the Iron Chest at her side, and raised the lid quietly so as not to disturb the boy. She took out a handful of tiny bright keys of all sorts and shapes and sizes and colours. But somehow—she could not explain it—they all looked as if they were seeds waiting to be sown.

Perhaps it was the fairy cobbler's song that made her feel this:

"Cobble new soles for the worn-out shoes!
Every kind of soul is good,
Every joy and sorrow is food—
Good for the slumbering seed's emprise,
Food for the venturesome heart that tries
To cobble new shoes for the worn-out souls!

"Scatter sweet rain on the thirsty dead!
Seeds find light through the narrowest chink,
Push up green hands for their food and drink,
Then find their keys to the mystic door,
And dance with young lambs on the fairy floor—
Cobble new souls for the worn-out dead!"

Every key had a label, each with a name. Curdie sat by, somewhat aloof, and watched the flames. Trystie called out in her young, ringing voice each name. Then,

"Cobble new soles!"

one by one, those abandoned Pigwidgeons rose up at the sound of his or her long-forgotten name, and came to Trystie, shambling and ashamed. Now that their wickedness was checked, Trystie saw they were badly pecked all over. This was, I suppose, the outcome of the battle the birds were to fight when Kit piped their marching song.

As the Pigwidgeons now slowly came up to Trystie, they all looked over their shoulders to right and left as if afraid of something—was it of the Creaky Cart? or was each ashamed of owning a name before the others? One by one they held out rooty, dry, timid hands, and Trystie gave every one his or her own key. Instantly the key disappeared and the creature walked away, piteously crying like a baby for its mother. They all crept away behind the throne and, huddled together, cried themselves to sleep. Two keys were left in the Chest unclaimed.

Trystie had not given many away when Kit awoke, and, without moving or saying one word, watched her and the Pigwidgeons. He must have been thinking how these miserable creatures had, after all his success in ruling them, and in spite of his despising them with all his heart, succeeded in terrifying him. He began to weep.

"Kit, boy," whispered Trystie, divining his thoughts and shame, "I have something to confess to my brave brother. Kit, dear, *I was awfully frightened at the flames.* And if Captain Leprecaun had not taken me, and if Godmother had not sent him—well, I don't know what would have happened. And, Kit, *you* wouldn't have been frightened if they had not plugged up your recorder!"

Then Kit was happier. He checked his tears, got up wearily, took his recorder to the Captain Cobbler, and asked him to pick out the plug with his awl. This was

easily done and the plug proved to be a long strip of Parson Parsnip's velvet coat !

Then Kit played his recorder again. The music came so soft and sweet that it seemed to find in every one's heart a deep silence, like, Trystie says, a starlit sea, waiting for the sunrise. Then the flames became less fierce. They lost their reds and yellows ; the greens and blues remained. Their roar and crack and hiss died away. It grew dark as night, and very soon the flames looked like a sea of steel-blue, rocking waves, into which the River peacefully flowed. Then right through the sea, and up into the River, came sailing a fleet of fleecy pink clouds bringing in tow the rosy dawn. Kit's music once again had brought the fairy ships.

On the prow of the Royal Barge, with twelve oars on each side, one mast, and a great burning-red lateen sail, with its emblem of the Fairy Cross shining like silver upon it, stood the Queen. She stepped ashore and ran to the children.

" Godmother ! " exclaimed Trystie, jumping up, " you mustn't kiss me till I tell you. I was afraid to do your bidding when I saw the flames, even though the Rainbow shone through them. O, Godmother, I am ashamed ! "

Trystie began to sob and cry. The Queen stood before the two children and spread a wing round each of them.

" Dear children," she said, " there's no shame in being afraid of terrifying things. If you could not be afraid, you would never grow braver and braver—as you must and will do. Will you be my Godson, Kit ? "

Kit looked up with a happy face. Trystie hid her face in the Queen's soft wing and her tears were dried. Then the Queen called the cobbler.

"Captain, dear friend," she asked, "are both pairs ready?"

"Yes, mighty Queen," he answered, "'tis the Princess's homing shoes are ready this thirteen year. Prince Kit's were ready too before I took his measure."

He put away carefully all his tools and then came and knelt on one knee before Trystie. She lifted each foot in turn. He took off the red shoes and put on a new pair of blue ones, pulling from his belt a glittering silvery blue lace, running it through the eyeholes quickly, and tying a beautiful bow. The lace looked like runnels of water going in and out, crossing and recrossing to meet at last and fall in two little cascades of fringe.

"Queen," said he, "one of the red shoes I'll be keeping for me pains—and for me happiness: the other—will it be your will, I'm thinking, that she always keeps it for a hold upon Fairyland—and a fairy-man who loves her?"

"Yes, brave Captain," answered the Queen, "yes indeed!"

Then Kit's turn came. His blue shoes fitted perfectly, and the shining strings looked grand.

"Now, Kit," the cobbler said, "you must shake hands with me, because ye're more a man than a king and I'm kind of brother to ye. When ye've grown as big a man as you ought, ye'll be every inch a King. It's meself will not grow any bigger, though I'm every inch a little cobbler, every inch the Captain of the Queen's Fleet, and every inch as long as me belt!"

The Queen then asked the Captain to have the ugly throne removed. He whistled. Sailors came running from the ships. They seized the heavy thing and it broke into dry mouldy twigs and the skin of a stoat. The sailors

then all fluttered away, like thistledown, upon important affairs.

Behind where the throne had stood, lay shrivelled roots of every kind scattered all about. But few had any resemblance to living creatures. Some looked as though they had been pecked all over by birds ; others as though they might once have had faces, though they had lost their eyes.

" These," said the Queen, " are of no use now. They are choking the choose-keys. Kit, there is one last thing you must do for your subjects, if you would leave them in kindness. Throw every one into the flames."

" Are they quite dead then, Godmother ? " asked the boy. He was now full of sorrow for the wretched things.

" These roots are all quite dead—like prisons," answered the Queen. " We must open the doors by burning them down, and so set the children free. The flames are mine too, and my River controls them. Throw them in, Kit, one by one. Captain Leprecaun, and his sailors too, will help you."

Then came the silvery sailors once more, and the burning began. The flames leaped again into their fierceness, with orange and rosy reds, bright yellows and fleeting greens. But they no longer roared and hissed, and the sparks did not fly.

Among the roots Kit saw and picked up the Parson's white tie, which Miss Duckling must have lost.

" Trystie," he asked, " have you a choose-key left for King Parsnip ? "

" Yes," she said ; " this one must be his because it is so rusty. The other, I am sure, is Miss Duckling's, because it's pearly and bright."

Then Kit took the little key and rubbed it till it shone

as bright as any of the others. He carefully tied it up in the piece of dirty white tape that had so feebly stood for a certain dignity of office.

"Godmother," the boy asked, "was his soul always wrapped up in his choker?"

"I think it almost always was, Kit," answered the Fairy Queen, with a loving laugh, enjoying, I cannot but think, my boy's not irreverential fun; "but he must have his chance, like the others, of getting outside his prison. Throw it into the flames, Kit."

Kit obeyed. Then he saw, shining on the ground, the brass ornament that had served for Crickety's breastplate. He had no sooner put it in his pocket to take back to Charley, the carter, than Curdie came up carrying something in his front teeth so gingerly that it was clearly distasteful to him. He dropped it at Kit's feet and looked up with a question twitching his nostrils. It was the rusty spring of the rat-trap, and stuck on its point was the peppermint bull's-eye! Kit was for putting these also in his pocket, when the Queen stopped him.

"I think, Kit," she said, "these also must go into the flames. No one can tell where Crickety's soul and the choose-key may be!"

So Kit threw them in also, and was right glad to see the last of the bull's-eye.

As each hard, shrivelled, shapeless thing was cast into the fire, a fiercer and more glorious flame rushed up into the air. Even the remains of Parson Parsnip made a great beautiful tongue of fire, and the peppermint burned gloriously. Curdie stood up on his hind legs to see better, and then fairly danced for joy. The children watched in silent wonder.

"It is so terrible and beautiful, Godmother!" said Trystie.

She and Kit are both sure of this, that, just as the tongue of each flame broke and vanished into the dark sky, a dimly seen, sleeping but happy, baby-face, with two silvery wings behind it, disappeared also.

CHAPTER XXIV

Davie is decorated and Kit is given a Commission—Captain Leprecaun's Grief—Home again and the Beginning of New Stories.

"TRYSTIE," said the Queen, "your quest is almost completed. Kit has won his day also, haven't you, Kit?"

"I don't know, Godmother, I don't know what I've won. But I'd rather be your God-boy than King of the Pigwidgeons any day!"

This was said as the flames were dying down. In a few seconds there was nothing left of them but little red and yellow tulips held up by their pointed green leaves, while the dawn glowed beyond and above in radiant rose colour. The children watched the fairy ships sail away down the river, and out at one of the archways of the Queen's Castle, into the moat beyond; and away and away to share in the earth's welcoming of the risen sun.

They were all standing just where they had left Robin playing with the pups and the kittens, and where the blackbirds in green jackets, perched on the end of the sweeping bough of the beech tree, had been singing the nursery rhymes. The child did not seem to have missed his sister; but when he saw Kit, he rushed at him. The bigger boy dropped on his knees and they revelled in a baby-hug.

Then there was a scamper in the beech tree above, a scamper and a twitter-chatter of many birds. The three

children looked up and saw, trotting down and along the bough, Sir Squirrel and his Dame and their four squirrillies. On Sir Squirrel's back, of course, was Davie singing at the top of his happy voice. He dismounted, and Trystie caught him as he jumped to the ground.

Then the two bigger boys, both at once, began telling each other their adventures. Trystie stood quietly aside listening: she was utterly happy with her Godmother's strong arm holding her close. Robin still was absorbed in his air-ball, as though his bit of blue sky had more wonder in it than anything his brothers could tell. The Leprecaun turned away and pulled his red hood down over his eyes. Behind him Curdie sat on his haunches, with his uplifted nose resting upon the little fairy-man's shoulder, and his eyes turned towards the hidden face. For the moment the dog's heart seemed to be more at home with the one person's sorrow than the many's happiness. The Leprecaun would, I think, have given up at this moment all his rule over springs and rivers, all his skill with lapstone and ships, perhaps even his hopes of getting back to old Ireland some day, could he have belonged to that happy family group—or even, perhaps, might he wait upon and protect and mend the shoes of our big little girl.

Davie suddenly stopped his chatter with Kit and came up to the Queen. He made a low bow.

"Please, my Majesty," he began; but the strong shining lady with the great wings which seemed to be everywhere, took his face in her hands and said:

"I am your Godmother, too, Davie, or there would have been no Fairy Cross for you to win."

"O please, thank you, thank you—Kit, don't tell mother first!—But, Majesty Godmother, I wanted to say

"Covered her hand with his biggest kisses"

thank you for making me Captain, but I couldn't help what I did—it just came to do, and made me."

"I know, Davie," answered the Queen very tenderly; "but children win the Fairy Cross for what they are and what they become, not for what they do. You had *got* brave and so just *had* to help Sir Squirrel."

Then the Queen took out of her bosom a little shining jewel and put it into Davie's hand.

"Captain," called the Queen, "a string from your belt, please, if you can spare one!"

So the brave fairy-man had to come into the group and thread the cross with one of his strands—spun from the spray of the water-brooks—and fasten it round Davie's neck. There the jewel will remain always, though none can see it but the people who love him best.

"Godmother," then asked Davie, radiantly happy, "is there no Fairy Cross for Kit?"

"Kit," she answered, "has learned what it is to be afraid. It was for that he had to come to Fairyland. Kit," she added, "I have a commission for you also. You are to be my own Shepherd Boy. My sheep are yours to tend. The Recorder—which Jonas gave you, though we were all along keeping it for you—is yours for always. Is that enough?"

Kit just knelt at her feet, and covered her hand with his biggest kisses. Then while Kit was still holding her hand, the Queen, her voice so full of tenderness and smiles, told them more things:

"In my country," she said, "which is everybody's country when they find it, very often each of two things may be better than the other, just because both of them are best. The Fairy Cross is the best thing for Davie; the

Recorder is the best thing that Kit could have. Davie is best to fight for me because he has learned how *not* to be afraid. Kit is best to tend my sheep because, having learned what fear means, he knows better than before how to be very merciful. Davie will perhaps have to fight wolves and dragons for my sake. Kit will have to see that my sheep never forget Fairyland, and ring their bells bravely in tune. To do this Kit also will have to fight big battles for my sake. One will be the multiplication table, Kit, though you can't understand why! And Davie's first bravery, perhaps, will be to give Bully Butcher Broom a fine apple and to ask him to be friends! Both will be big things done for me, little lads, though much bigger ones will come when you are strong men."

There was now a little silence. Even the birds stopped singing to think.

It was here that Robin chimed in, speaking, Trystie says, for the first time in Fairyland:

"Godmother," he asked, "Mayn't Curdie have a blue air-ball like me?"

"I think," replied the Queen, taking the dog's shaggy head in her hands, as if reading his answer; "I think my Lord Curdie would just let such a gift fly away home again into the sky. He says the best of four legs is that there are so many things he can have without holding; and less bother too! But, Davie, I have his reward in keeping for him, and he knows it: don't you, my lord Doggie? It is something more to do for me and my God-children."

Curdie then made a fine speech by wagging himself all over.

Then Kit said:

"Godmother, what has Trystie won?"

But his sister answered the question by nestling closer under the great wing. Then she looked up full of her great happiness.

"Godmother," she said, "there is one more key. I think it must be Miss Duckling's. Where is she?"

"She's at home," said Davie, "—I mean, in the Squirrels' home."

"Yes, your sweet Majesty," said Dame Squirrel; "after the battle, I found her sitting behind our larder, quietly crying. She said she had tried to get ahead of the others to warn us, but fell behind. Then she was left, and would not go back home, as all the life there was horrible. So I asked her if she would like to be nursery governess to our squirrillies. Sir Squirrel wants me to go about with him more. But she must promise, I said, never to give them lessons in crying; there's plenty of rain without tears, as we say up in the trees. She said she had no experience in washing faces or in lessons; but, if the children would first teach her their lessons, she would do her best to correct them. That fell in so nicely with Sir Squirrel's and my ideas about education that we immediately engaged her. Her only doubt as to her fitness was, she said, that she could never choose between one thing and another, so that things she didn't want *would* choose her. That might be awkward, your Majesty, when a pole-cat is in the neighbourhood."

"Yes, indeed it would," said the Queen; "but when she gets the little key Trystie has been keeping for her everything will be different. It will be a safeguard to herself as well as the little ones against pole-cats and things like that. Besides, as long as she keeps it safely, she will grow prettier and happier and usefuller every day of her

life. She will love the rain and my River, and will soon wash the little faces so cleverly that their eyes will get blacker and brighter every day, and they will never need to cry."

Then Trystie gave Dame Squirrel Miss Duckling's key to carry to her. Her Quest was now fulfilled.

"Godmother," she asked, "do tell us where the River is? I don't *quite* understand."

"Everywhere," the Queen answered, as she spread her great wings over all of them—the children and the Squirrel family and Davie's playmates. "Don't you see it now flowing all about, in and out of the farm; up in the rafters of the barn among the owls, down in the dim castles of the mice; up in Sir Squirrel's free mansion in the tree, down in the dark mines of the moles? Little rills run into every bird's nest and every child's nursery. Where love and kindness flow, there is the River. Wherever the River runs, there is Fairyland. Every one must some day come and drink of its water. Until they do this they will never understand anything. Even now, God-children, and all my own folk, two-legged, winged, and four-footed"—here she looked down into Curdie's eyes, which could not leave her face—"you are in the River and the River is home."

Trystie looked at the beech-bough down which the Squirrels and Davie had run. There, as she seemed to have expected, stood the kitchen dresser with the blue mugs and cups hanging in their right places. Her Godmother's wing was soft and strong and shining all about her, and it held her close as she took the mugs and cups off their hooks and set them on the table for breakfast. Then running along the leafy top of the dresser she saw the Squirrel family waving good-bye to her with their tails. Nothing was surprising in two things being in one place—

any more than in her setting the breakfast while she was in Fairyland. A great rush of new gladness swept into her heart as her own home became quite real to her. It was a joy, too, to see the River running through the old house, and out at the back door, and a tiny runnel of it into the old mouse-hole. Yet, O dear, O dear, there was her dear Captain going slowly out by the door also, with his face in his hands! Curdie, who was sitting by her, started to follow him, but stopped and looked back into Trystie's face. The door and latch closed softly.

"Captain, darling Captain!" Trystie cried after her friend, in most earnest appeal; "stay with us, please, please!"

Then the long string of the wooden latch—hung low for the children's sake—was pulled and the door opened a half-inch again, as if the departing guest were coming back. But he did not return; and Trystie heard little leaping soft footsteps running along the brick path.

She ran to the door, threw it open, and sped round to the front—but only to see her cobbler-knight already half-way up the grassy hill beyond the cornfield.

"Curdie!" she cried, "after him! and *make* him come home!"

Curdie obeyed with a bound, leaped the gate into the road, and was gone in a flash. Trystie stood, shading her eyes and looking after her two friends. Curdie caught up with the Leprecaun just as he reached the distant sky-line. There, for one moment, the two stood together, taking, she thought, a last look upon the farm; and then they were gone.

Trystie still stood looking after them for one minute, and then ran back to the kitchen. There, to her joy, stood her

"Her dear Captain going slowly out"

mother. No words were then spoken. There was, indeed, no need. The mother somehow knew in her heart that Trystie had been away on that far journey, the Quest of the Choose-keys, which she used to say must some day be taken. She knew too that Trystie would in good time tell us all her wonderful story. She saw the shimmering blue shoes and felt them to be a promise that this time their wearer would not vanish again: a sure promise, even though the next moment the blue shoes were gone, leaving the child with only the one red shoe in her hand and two bare feet on the brick floor.

"Trystie, child," said the mother, with the most welcoming kiss that ever warmed the heart of a come-home traveller, "run upstairs and dress yourself quickly."

As the child turned to go, however, Kit's voice rang through the house:

"Mother, I'm quite well again! May I get up?"

Then Davie called out:

"Me too, Mother!" And he began to sing at the top of his voice. Then Kit called out again:

"But, I say, Mother! my things are all in rags!"

They could not wait for permission, but ran down in their nightshirts. To their mother's joy they both looked quite well, though still very thin. Robin was a little behind, because he had waited to untie his air-ball from the foot of his cot and bring it with him. Then the mother fetched her grandmother's Paisley shawl that always hangs over the end of the couch in the parlour, and was wrapping Trystie in it just as I came in. It was such a brilliant hot morning that, without waiting while the children dressed, we had the happiest and funniest and hungriest breakfast in our lives,

the travellers all together trying to tell Honeypot and Kirstie their adventures. The loving nurse must have Prince Tom Tit and Princess Jenny Wren there too, and both of them, Trystie said, behaved just as sweetly as if they were still in the Fairy Queen's audience chamber.

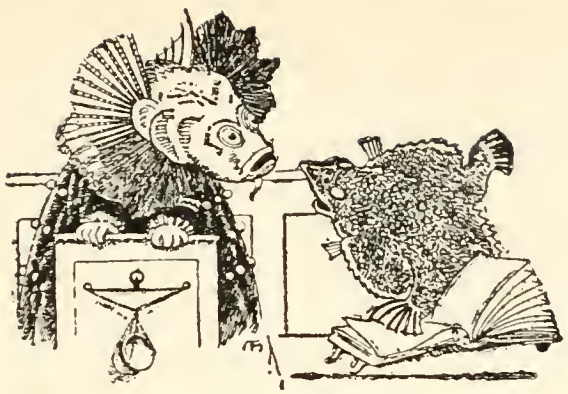
So great was the gladness, so merry the chatter, so quickly did Kirstie's floury scones and the yellow butter and the creamy milk in five mugs and two bottles disappear, that not one of them all yet realized that Curdie was not with them.

The dog did not come back; and this is one of the many reasons why the story does not end here. Besides, a great number of new stories began that very morning. For in every cottage for miles round a new baby—such a sweet and smiling one!—had arrived from somewhere out of Fairyland during the night.

But what had new babies to do with Pigwidgeons? Trystie and Kit thought they knew.

THE END

CENTRAL CIRCULATION
CHILDREN'S ROOM



Children who want to know more about Kit and Trystie and Honey-pot's Adventures at the Bottom of the Sea ought to read

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or

The Stolen Baby

By the Author of "Trystie's Quest"

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